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A PROBLEM IN HISTORICAL TECHNIQUE: COLLINGWOOD AND IONIAN PHYSICS

G. S. KIRK

R. G. COLLINGWOOD's *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford, 1945) was published posthumously; the first chapter of the first Part had been completely prepared for publication by the author, the rest is an incomplete revision of lecture notes used in 1934 and 1937. Collingwood distinguishes three historical attitudes to nature, each characterized by the unconscious use of a different analogy: the Greeks thought of nature as a living creature; Renaissance thinkers tended to regard it as a kind of machine; the modern view 'is based on the analogy between the processes of the natural world as studied by natural scientists and the vicissitudes of human affairs as studied by historians' (*The Idea of Nature*, p. 9). It is not my purpose to consider this analysis as a whole, but only that part of it which deals with Ionian thought; this forms the small proportion of the whole work which was regarded as final by the author.

On a first rather rapid reading of this book I was induced, as I believe many others to have been, to accept the author's account as a satisfactory restatement of some of the main tendencies and motives of Presocratic physics. A closer examination convinced me that Collingwood gives a greatly distorted picture of Ionian speculation — a picture which, because of its superficial attraction, deserves specific correction. In particular, his account is vitiated by the attempt to re-cast ancient thought, at whatever cost, into a series of questions and answers; this was a tendency, in 1934, which later became for Collingwood an article of faith and was ruthlessly applied to all philosophical thought. The dangers of both the tendency (shared by other historians of thought, also) and the developed dogma I shall discuss in general terms; but first it may be useful to examine the particular instance of this tendency provided by the early chapters of *The Idea of Nature*. The general discussion of the limitations of problem-attribution, which forms the central part of this paper, will be followed by a concluding section dealing with other faults in Collingwood's treatment of Ionian physics.

1

On p. 29 of *The Idea of Nature* begins the formulation of questions and answers attributed to Ionian thinkers; these questions and answers are set out below in a tabulated form in which the virtues or defects of this kind of analysis may be more easily appreciated. The appropriate page-reference follows each quotation.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ATTRIBUTED BY COLLINGWOOD:

(1) to the Ionians in general

- (a) "What is nature?"
(pp. 29, 43)
[they at once convert it into the question:]
- (b) "What are things made of?"
[or]
- (c) "What is the original unchanging substance which underlies all the changes of the natural world with which we are acquainted?" } [This question implies 3 'preliminary points' which must have been 'very firmly settled' (p. 29):]
- (i) 'That there are "natural" things.'
(p. 29)
- (ii) 'That "natural" things constitute a single "world of nature".'
(p. 30)
- (iii) 'That what is common to all "natural" things, is their being made of a single "substance" or material.'
(p. 30)
[— 'This was the special or peculiar presupposition of Ionian physics' (p. 30); it led to the question:]
- (d) "That being so, what can we say about this single substance?"
(p. 30)
- (e) "What is the one thing out of which all things are made?"
(p. 39)

(2) to individual Ionians

Anaximander [had grappled with the question:]

[He had answered:]

- (f) "Why, if the various kinds of natural substances are all made of the same original matter, do they behave in different ways?"
(p. 37)

"Because opposites are differentiated and segregated out of the original undifferentiated mass by its rotary movement".
(p. 37)

Anaximenes [had lost interest in (e); 'His question was:]

['His answer was:]

- (g) "Why do different kinds of things behave differently?"
['That is not the question of Ionian physics, it is the question of Pythagorean physics.'
(p. 39)]

"Because the thing out of which they are made, no matter what that thing is, undergoes different arrangements in space".
(p. 39)

These questions and answers provoke the following observations.

(1) Before we can say that the Ionians asked the question 'What is nature?' we must be quite sure that this is a question they *could* ask, that is, that it does not include any term or concept which they would not have understood. But even if we understand what is meant by the English word 'nature' (and indeed one purpose of Collingwood's book is to show that this word gives rise to different concepts), and even if we assume that 'nature' can be properly represented by the Greek word φύσις (*physis*), we still do not know that the Milesians would have considered this a suitable term to apply specifically to the outside world. There is no firm evidence that any Ionian before Heraclitus (in whom, however, Collingwood was not interested) used the term φύσις at all. Some doxographical writers suggest that all philosophers before Socrates wrote *περί φύσεως* ('On nature') — a convenient summary in the language of Aristotle which became attributed as a universal book-title to all those whom Aristotle had described as φυσικοί (literally 'physicists'): to Anaximander, for example, according to Themistius and the Suda (Diels-Kranz 12 A 7, 12 A 2). The probability is, indeed, that the Milesians did not entirely avoid the word φύσις; but we are not therefore entitled to assume that they used it in any particular way in answer to any particular question — a question, moreover, postulated as the key to their whole view of the *cosmos*. Thus Collingwood hardly clarified the situation when he accepted without further limitation Aristotle's anachronistic summary of the chief Ionian problem. That he did so accept it is shown by the fact that, whereas on p. 29 he wrote that 'According to Aristotle' the questions of the Ionian thinkers were some of those recorded above, he assumed on the next page that those questions actually were asked, and on p. 43 he introduced the same attribution with the words 'I said that. . .'

(2) Even if we disregard the fact that any question attributed to the Ionians (except Heraclitus) which includes the term 'nature' or 'natural' is imprecise and indeed meaningless, it is obvious that there is a good deal of repetition and looseness in the questions attributed by Collingwood. Thus question (c) goes very much further than (b), of which it is implied to be an alternative; the three 'preliminary points' or assumptions involved in the converted form (b-c) of the original question (a) are actually involved only in version (c). Now preliminary point (iii) is said to have led to question (d): here the reader has the impression that Collingwood is guiding him through a detailed process of analysis and inference which will lead to some new conclusion. But (d) turns out to be simply another version of (c), the question which entailed the three preliminary assumptions. The argument is, in fact, 'X must be caused by Y . . . Y causes X' — but the reader may be prevented from noticing this

by a superficial change, during the course of the argument, in the description (but not the value) of X. He may feel in any case that his time is being wasted by this kind of thing. The statement which forms preliminary point (iii), that the 'special or peculiar presupposition of Ionian physics' was 'that what is common to all "natural" things is their being made of a single "substance" or material', is a correct if not a new summary: nothing is added to it by the whole repetitious and pretentious tissue of 'questions'. If one must attribute some primary question to the Milesians the following would be more adequate: 'What are things made of—for they must be made of some one thing?' Naturally this does not tell us everything about the Milesians, whose attempts at rationalism were based upon the conviction that the world is explicable, that it has a determinable history or genealogy like a man, and upon an instinctive belief in a community of man and his surroundings. Much of this is neglected by Collingwood, who makes no advance on Aristotle except in confusion.

(3) To turn to the more specific questions attributed to two particular Ionians: Anaximander's question, (f) in my tabulation, is not one which most people would consider, on the basis of the available evidence, that he was trying to resolve; nor does Collingwood give any reasons for choosing this question. The 'answer' does not help, either, for although as framed it is an answer to some question it is certainly not a relevant answer to the question formulated here. What Collingwood may have had in mind was this: Anaximander assumed like Thales that things in the world are made out of one substance, but improved on him by naming as this substance not a specific kind of matter, parts of which are still visible in our world, but something indefinite. Yet he still had to overcome the difficulty of explaining how an original single substance could give rise to two or more different derivatives. This he did by the simple but prejudicial assumption that the original 'one' was a mixture of some kind, from which differentiated objects were subsequently separated out. I suggest that Collingwood's obscure question and non-corresponding answer only hide these relatively simple facts. Anaximenes, the third great Milesian, receives even odder treatment. On p. 39 Collingwood suggests that Anaximenes had lost interest in (e), a form of the main question of Ionian physics. How, then, if one out of the three thinkers whom Collingwood treats as composing the 'Ionians' had lost interest in this question, can it properly be described as 'characteristic of this Ionian cosmology' (p. 29)? It is further declared that the question which Anaximenes did ask, (g), 'is not the question of Ionian physics': yet a comparison of (g) with (f), the question attributed to Anaximander, shows that the two are, if not identical, at least very similar. Since Anaximander's thought

was quite certainly 'Ionian' in character this rather spoils Collingwood's argument, which cannot be revived even by the recognition that (f) must be wrongly formulated. The facts are that the problem faced by Anaximenes cannot be rigorously separated from that of Anaximander, and that Ionian physics was more than a search for a definition of matter.

The foregoing examination of questions and answers attributed by Collingwood to the Milesians has shown that they are either superfluous or misleading or both, and do nothing but obscure some of the obvious difficulties faced by the early monists. The resolution of past systems of thought into specific problems and solutions is deliberately carried out by Collingwood, and we may now turn to consider the special dangers inherent in this kind of procedure.

2

The attribution of questions and answers as a specific historical technique

On p. 42 of *The Idea of Nature* Collingwood wrote that 'The history of science, in so far as it is a history of scientific progress, consists not so much in the progressive accumulation of facts as in the progressive clarification of problems. What makes a natural scientist is not his knowledge of facts about nature but his ability to ask questions about nature'. History is itself a science: 'generically it belongs to what we call the sciences: that is, the forms of thought whereby we ask questions and try to answer them' (*The Idea of History*, p. 9). That the historian's task consists in reformulating questions which were asked in history is made quite clear in chapter v of the *Autobiography*, entitled 'Question and Answer'. Collingwood used to give this advice to his philosophy pupils: 'never think you understand any statement made by a philosopher until you have decided, with the utmost possible clarity what the question is to which he means it for an answer' (*Autobiography*, p. 74). Here he probably had in mind comparatively recent philosophers who left consecutive accounts of their theories, but the same is true of ancient philosophers: 'Or again, suppose he [sc. the historian] is reading a passage of an ancient philosopher. Once more, he must know the language in a philological sense and be able to construe; but by doing that he has not yet understood the passage as an historian of philosophy must understand it. In order to do that, he must see what the philosophical problem was, of which his author is here stating the solution. He must then think that problem out for himself, see what possible solutions of it might be offered, and see why this particular philosopher chose that solution instead of another. This means re-thinking for himself the thought of his author, and nothing short of that will make him the historian of that

author's philosophy' (*The Idea of History*, p. 283). This all sounds delightfully easy and eminently sensible: but the phrases 'he must see what the philosophical problem was' and 'He must then think out that problem for himself' conceal the historian's most difficult task, according to Collingwood that of reformulating someone else's questions. In this respect Collingwood undoubtedly went beyond what would be considered a reasonable procedure for a historian of philosophy. He was perfectly right that one cannot reconstruct the thought of, for example, an early Greek thinker merely by assembling the ancient testimonies, rejecting what is obviously unreliable and forming a composite picture from what is retained—this he described as 'the scissors-and-paste method' (*The Idea of History*, p. 257). One has to try to assess the thinker's whole intellectual background, to make some guess at his general intentions and motives, and to define his unconscious presuppositions. But these last-mentioned tasks are subordinated by Collingwood to the definition of question and answer, a definition which is the first task, in order of time, of the historian. Conventional historians (those whom Collingwood called 'unscientific'—but not including those who merely rearrange the testimonies of earlier historians) may prefer to leave that definition until a later stage; indeed, while fully recognizing that the historian must understand as well as he can the problems confronting a long-dead thinker, they may very well forgo altogether the attribution to that thinker of specific questions, but rather describe those problems in their own words as they understand them.

Collingwood's own mistakes in the attempt to apply the method of 'scientific history' to the Ionians, and to resolve their thought into general and specific questions and answers, have been noted already. In view of the failure of this particular application of the method it is perhaps worth considering whether the method itself tends to have particular limitations in practice.

(1) It is questionable whether all early thinkers were aware that they were taking part in a process of 'the continuous clarification of problems', and whether their thinking *necessarily* took this form. It is conceivable, for example, that Thales' views took the form of dogmatic propositions, with an occasional inference, based upon his observations of the outside world, and that this was the manner of his thought. For example: 'No one before has fully described what lies around us. It is useful to do so, and I proceed to do it: the sea is water and some of the land turns into water and air is clearly evaporated from water, therefore all things are water', and so on—rather than 'What is the world? or rather, since it seems to be one, what one thing is the outside world? It must be water, because ...' Which way of thinking Thales in fact adopted, or in what proportion each way was combined, is irrelevant here: I merely wish to put

forward the possibility that Collingwood's pattern cannot be automatically imposed upon all thinking which he evidently accepted as 'philosophical' or 'scientific'. In fact, no Presocratic was 'scientific' in any sense of the word; should we not say therefore that they should not be subjected to the question-and-answer analysis? Perhaps they were 'scientific' in Collingwood's sense but not in the general sense (implying careful observation, firm logic, and so on)? Yet this, as I have maintained, cannot be certainly determined, at any rate in the case of the Milesians; and the historian has no means of judging what part of their mental activity was naïvely descriptive, what part aporetic. For Collingwood himself this difficulty did not arise and he was content to treat all those Greek thinkers whom Aristotle termed *physikoi* as scientists of a kind, and therefore as thinkers whose thought can properly be reconstituted into questions and answers. This is not a fault of the method as such, but of the manner of applying it: Collingwood's 'scientific history' is only appropriate to philosophers who did, as a historical fact, ask questions and attempt to answer them. I myself would not agree that only this mode of mental activity deserves to be called philosophical or scientific, though it is true that the attempt to solve problems is an important part of science or philosophy. Are we to say, for example, that when a famous archaeologist, on being shown a newly-discovered pot, immediately says (without any mental questions or answers) 'That is by Euphronius', his activity does not deserve to be called in some way scientific? All that he is doing, it is true, is recognizing or claiming to recognize; but a good deal of what most scientists and philosophers think and do is of this kind.

(2) The reconstruction of *questions* which were actually asked by philosophers of the past can only be carried out by the historian when he has unmistakable evidence of the exact nature of the philosopher's *answers*. Where there is any doubt about this (as there is, for example, to a large degree in the case of thinkers like the Presocratics whose writings, if any, have survived only in fragments or not at all; and to some degree in the case of any dead philosopher), the reconstruction of the questions to which the assumed answers were intended as answers must be tentative and to some extent subjective: Collingwood failed to take due account of this. His argument was, in fact, circular: a philosopher's 'answer' cannot be fully understood until it is known what question it answers, and, unless the philosopher actually tells us, that question can only be identified by inference from the answer. Most philosophical writing consists solely of 'answers', that is, of solutions to problems which often were not stated because they were taken for granted: but in the case of 'primitive' thought — thought which operates in a different manner and upon different objects from our own — what is

taken for granted may lie beyond the grasp of the modern historian. Collingwood himself implied the circularity of the question-and-answer analysis: 'If you cannot tell what a proposition means unless you know what question it is meant to answer, you will mistake its meaning if you make a mistake about that question' (*Autobiography* 33). Even so he failed to understand that this circularity reduced his 'scientific history' to exactly the level of conventional history, a level where the historian is forced on occasion to resort to intuition and conjecture. What the ordinary honest historian does is to consider the evidence about what, for example, Thales thought; to assign provisionally greater weight to some pieces of evidence, less to others, on the basis of his opinion of the reliability of the various sources; to consider the resulting picture of what Thales thought against his other knowledge of the period and of the type of speculation it produced; to reconsider and perhaps modify his first picture if it does not accord with his impression of the period as a whole; and finally, perhaps, if he thinks that identifiable problems are being faced in this period, to try and describe *in his own words*, taking into account the tendencies of other thinkers of the period, the general nature of these problems. All the time he will make it plain what parts of his description are conjectural, and what is the basis of his conjectures. To what extent Collingwood expected the 'scientific historian' to behave in this inexact but circumspect way is not made entirely clear; but the fact is that where the evidence is insufficient there is no possible alternative, except perhaps merely to record all the evidence and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions. Thus the question-and-answer analysis, regarded as the primary part of the historian's procedure, leads to no greater precision (and usually to greater imprecision) than a less formalized approach; regarded simply as an attitude of mind which is appropriate to certain kinds of historical problem, it is accepted and practised automatically by all competent historians: in this respect there is nothing new or exclusive about it.

(3) So far the conclusion has been reached that the reconstitution of problems is not possible for all forms of speculation, and in particular for all primitive speculation; and that this kind of historical assessment, even where it is possible and appropriate, cannot be applied more rigidly, more extensively, or more precisely than any other kind. I shall now suggest some ways in which the explicit reconstruction of questions asked by thinkers of the past may encourage fallible historians to make certain mistakes which they might otherwise have avoided: mistakes such as Collingwood himself evidently made in his presentation of the Milesian thinkers. (a) All historians have to work primarily on the basis of the whole available mass of *prima facie* acceptable and relevant testimonies.

This mass of testimonies may contain many 'answers' to many different questions. The historian, therefore, must distinguish the different answers before he can proceed to infer the questions to which they were answers: this sorting out is inevitably a precarious process in which the historian's own subjective judgment is an important factor; and however much he himself operates as the scientist which Collingwood defined him as, by asking questions about how many and what kind of questions were asked by the object of his study, he still cannot attain to any degree of precision whatsoever. Indeed, if several totally different topics were discussed by the thinker whose thought he is trying to describe, the historian would do far better not to assign questions at all and so predispose himself to a finite view of that thinker's activities; or at least not to attempt to assign priority of importance to certain questions. In fact, since in this case there can be no certainty about the comprehensiveness of any single question, the formulation of any question is misleading. (b) For the historian to be able to formulate a question which corresponds with one which actually was asked, two things are necessary: that the historian infers logically, and that his philosopher inferred equally logically. Collingwood himself showed that the first condition is not inevitably present when he formulated a non-corresponding question and answer for Anaximander; and it is obvious that strict logic is not necessarily to be expected from any philosopher on all occasions, and especially from a pre-Aristotelian 'primitive'. If either condition is lacking the historian will make a quite needless mistake in his reconstruction. The good historian, of course, will be able to assess the probable degree and nature of any illogicality in his subject, and will allow for it in his attribution of a question; but here again it is the historian's own good judgment that will lead to a true presentation, and not the rigid adherence to a particular method. In the *Autobiography* Collingwood seemed to assert that every philosopher must be completely logical, and stated that 'The fact that we can identify his problem is proof that he has solved it; for we only know what the problem was by arguing back from the solution' (p. 70). This is an extreme statement of Collingwood's position and probably does not correspond with his more sober thought on the subject. (c) Collingwood's whole assumption that historical questions can be inferred from extant 'answers' rests on the prior assumption that any answer can only be the answer to one question. This is not always true. He admitted that a specific answer is the answer to a specific question, a general answer to a general question; but unless a certain exactness in the framing of the answer exists, no single question to which it is an answer can be inferred. The evidence about Thales, for example, is so slight that this degree of exactness cannot be achieved: thus all we can define as

his 'answer' on the basis of the evidence (assuming for the sake of argument that he did consciously ask certain questions) might be the statement 'All things are made of water'. Formally this could be the answer to either of two questions: 'What are all things made of?' or 'What things are made of water?' It is clear that a very different interpretation could be placed upon his interests according to which of these two questions the historian infers. In fact one assumes that the historian uses his common sense in this choice, while making use of his preconceptions derived from study of the evidence; but again it would be the historian and not the method that would save the day. (d) How far back is the historian to carry the inference of questions? Collingwood himself inferred three preliminary points which must have been decided before the question he attributed to the Ionians could have been asked: of these preliminary points each is seen eventually to lie at a different stage of assumption, such that (iii) implies (ii) and (ii) in its turn implies (i). Now it is plain that if the historian makes a mistake in the first stage of inference, that is, in the formulation of the immediate question which gives rise to the answer which he thinks that a philosopher's ideas must constitute, this mistake will vitiate all further stages of inference; and that at each stage there will be an added opportunity for wrong formulation. Of course, the final (but logically prior) inference may turn out to be so absurd that the historian suspects that something has gone wrong; although in our present example the ultimate 'preliminary point' which must have been 'firmly settled' by the Ionians (note that Collingwood was not just recording his own analysis of a situation), namely that 'there are "natural" things', did not, in spite of its historical improbability, cause Collingwood any qualms. The conventional historian whose inferences are not subjected to any scheme or pattern is not so likely to reduplicate error by blindly carrying the process of inference two stages back; and because he does not rely on any expectation of absolute logic, or strict relationships of cause and effect, in his material, he is more likely to apply every particular inference which he is forced to make to the touchstone of assured fact and general probability.

(4) Two final criticisms may be made of Collingwood's historical methods, although neither criticism is *necessarily* involved in the question-and-answer analysis. First, it is tempting, if one does adopt such an analysis, to attribute direct questions in inverted commas: this makes an unfair appeal for the credulity of the uncritical reader, and in general it is a good principle to reserve inverted commas for statements which are believed to have been actually made, or for exact translations of such statements. Secondly, we learn in the *Idea of History*, p. 269f, that 'the scientific historian' must read his sources 'with a question in his mind, having taken the initiative by deciding

for himself what he wants to find out from them . . . [he] puts them to the torture, twisting a passage ostensibly about something quite different into an answer to the question he has decided to ask'. Naturally Collingwood did not mean to be so extreme as he here appears to be; but it is nevertheless clear that the type of historian he favours has to formulate his question about the evidence before he has properly drawn any conclusions about the evidence's ultimate natural limitations. Doubtless all historians do ask themselves questions about their material at one stage or another: the difference is that the conventional ones, by carrying out a preliminary process of survey and classification, including part of what Collingwood's abhorred 'scissors-and-paste' historians do, are more likely to ask themselves helpful and relevant questions than the man who insists on acting 'scientifically' from the very beginning.

The conclusion of this investigation of Collingwood's method of historiography is that it differs from normal enlightened practice only by being more schematized and inflexible, and by encouraging the application of one form of historical analysis to the history of thought, too invariably and too early in the process of assessment. Although he may not have meant by 'scientist' and 'scientific' quite what most people mean, he did nevertheless imply that the historian is a sort of calculating machine working out determinable problems: this is wrong, and it is blatantly wrong of the historian of thought, above all of the historian of ancient, primitive, fragmentary thought. He also implied that forms of thought have not changed, and that all thought about 'nature' is of the problem-solving type; and that methods of thought are so constant as to allow the historian to reconstruct thought-processes in history with invariable success. It may be objected that some of the criticisms I have put forward are unfair because they are relevant only to extreme applications of the question-and-answer analysis: I would reply that Collingwood's 'scientific history' demands an extreme application, that he himself applied it in an extreme way in *The Idea of Nature*, and that only if applied schematically and consistently (that is, to extremes) does his type of historical analysis differ in any way from conventional historiography — to which he himself, at all events, felt himself to be bitterly opposed. It might further be felt that no one else would be inclined to approach the history of thought quite in the manner that Collingwood recommended. This may be true: but there are many historians who unconsciously indulge, to a lesser degree, in the illegitimate or premature assignment of particular problems; the above criticisms are relevant to them also.

3

Other faults in the account of Ionian physics

We may finally turn to consider some errors which depend not upon Collingwood's propensity for attributing improbable questions but upon his failure properly to evaluate and apply the available evidence. It is apparent that he did not satisfactorily distinguish the value of different doxographical sources, that is, their closeness to or distance from Theophrastus' basic history *The Opinions of the Physicists*; nor did he attempt to take account of the limitations of both Aristotle and Theophrastus as historians of earlier thought. A good example of this lack of critical judgment occurs in the notes on p. 33 of *The Idea of Nature*. There the expression 'using Theophrastus' is applied to two different doxographical sources: in n.2 it is applied to pseudo-Plutarch the author of the *Stromateis*, and in n.3 to Simplicius. But Simplicius in the passage referred to (in *Phys.* p. 154, 14) is not merely *using* Theophrastus, he is actually quoting him, and the words reproduced by Collingwood are among those introduced by Simplicius' phrase 'Theophrastus . . . writes as follows in the *Physical History*'. Pseudo-Plutarch on the other hand was certainly not quoting directly from Theophrastus. Diels described the passage in which the phrase quoted by Collingwood occurs as 'aus Theophrast', and there are good internal reasons for thinking that these *Stromateis* may follow Theophrastus fairly closely; more than this cannot be said. Simplicius here must be considered far more reliable for Theophrastus than pseudo-Plutarch, and the historian should not suggest that their value is precisely the same. In fact, however, the phrase quoted from Theophrastus by Simplicius describes the views not of Anaximander, as Collingwood seemed to think, but of Anaxagoras, who is then said to resemble Anaximander in his treatment of the elements! Nor was Theophrastus convinced that even Anaxagoras' $\mu\acute{\iota}\gamma\mu\alpha$ was, historically speaking, 'indefinite both in kind and size', for he added the words 'which he would seem to wish to say'. This is not quite the end of the snares constructed in these two notes for the innocent reader: for although in n.2 Collingwood rightly accepts the opinion of pseudo-Plutarch that for Anaximander the world is cylinder-shaped (confirmed by Hippolytus *Ref.* 1, 6, 3; Aetius III, 10, 2), he adds these words: 'Diogenes Laertius, however, says that Anaximander regarded the earth as spherical, (σφαίροειδῆ) . . .' Now Diogenes' isolated authority here is so weak as to be almost negligible; and his opinion, even if for the sake of exhaustivity it should be mentioned, should not be made to appear as a reasonable alternative to the infinitely better testified view that Anaximander's earth was cylindrical. This failure to assess correctly the different ancient sources and to inform the reader about their different value is a recurrent defect of Colling-

wood's treatment of the Presocratics. Another defect is his inaccurate use of words like 'fragment' and phrases like 'he said', 'we are told'. A fragment of an ancient writer is an isolated word or group of words which are known to have been actually used by him, but which cannot be assigned to any particular context. What then did Collingwood mean when on p. 38 he wrote of 'the longest of his [*sc.* Anaximenes'] surviving fragments'? — for except for the one word *χαλαρόν*, noted as original, this 'fragment' is a paraphrase by Plutarch. When on p. 43 of the same work we read of 'the enormous intellectual energy that is attested by their [*sc.* the Ionians'] surviving fragments', we begin to feel still more uneasy: for there is no *fragment* of Thales (although on p. 31 Collingwood mentions 'the fragments which have come down to us of Thales' own utterances'); there is *one* of Anaximander; one slightly doubtful sentence, and a few isolated words, of Anaximenes; and a great many fragments of Heraclitus, with whom, however, Collingwood was not concerned. Then on p. 34, after a statement that in Anaximander 'opposites . . . are generated and simultaneously segregated', come these words: 'In this way, we are told, Anaximander did in fact argue. We are also told that he regarded the creative process as consisting of rotary movement.' In truth we are told neither of these things, which involve a greater or lesser degree of conjecture by Collingwood himself; it is a fairly safe rule to assume that when he writes 'we are told' or 'he said' Collingwood means 'one might risk the conjecture that . . .'.

The effects of these additional classes of error in historical method upon the accounts given of individual Milesians may now be considered.

On p. 31 begins the misleading talk about 'fragments . . . of Thales' own utterances'. One of these 'fragments' is the statement of Diogenes Laertius that according to Thales the world is 'besouled and full of daimons', *ἐμψυχον καὶ δαιμόνων πλήρη*. Collingwood did not consider the probability that Diogenes here was dependent on Aristotle's remarks that Thales thought the magnet to have soul and all things to be full of gods, *πάντα πλήρη θεῶν εἶναι* — a phrase which occurred without specific attribution at Plato *Laws* 899b. This evidence of Aristotle's, among the most important that we possess about Thales, is finally mentioned in a footnote after the main account of Thales is ended, n. 1 on p. 34; it is introduced by the disparaging words 'If Thales really said that all things are full of gods . . .'. One is not obliged to believe that Thales *said* precisely this; the words are probably those of Plato and Aristotle; but there are surely reasonable grounds for believing that he said something like it. Collingwood continues: 'But it is not quite certain that the saying belongs to Thales and not to Heraclitus; nor, if it does belong to Thales, what he meant by it'. It is true that Aristotle attributed a

similar belief to Heraclitus, but in very different words; this is not surprising, for Aristotle considered that nearly all early thinkers shared the same view of soul; and the belief attributed to Thales that the magnet has soul is too bizarre to have been *invented* by Aristotle. I agree that 'it is not quite certain' what Thales meant by the views attributed to him by Aristotle, seeing that virtually nothing in the history of Presocratic thought is quite certain: but the meaning seems to me to be as plain as most things in this field. It may seem strange that Collingwood doubted one of the more solid pieces of evidence about Thales: the reason will appear below. What evidence, it may be asked, *did* he really accept? He accepted a collection of aphorisms in Diogenes Laertius which even that catholic scholar did not assign to Thales without caution: Diogenes I, 35, φέρεται δὲ καὶ ἀποφθέγματα αὐτοῦ [*sc.* Thales] τάδε · πρεσβύτατον τῶν ὄντων θεός · ἀγέννητον γάρ · κάλλιστον κόσμος · ποίημα γάρ θεοῦ · μέγιστον τόπος · ἅπαντα γὰρ χωρεῖ, κτλ. ('And these apophthegms too are assigned to Thales: Oldest of all existing things is god; for he is ungenerated. Fairest is the world-order; for it is the creation of god. Greatest is space; for it holds all things . . . ' and so on). Collingwood concerned himself only with the first two aphorisms, although the group is clearly homogeneous and the acceptance of one involves the acceptance of all, 'space' included. These palpable Hellenistic inventions were accepted as reliable evidence by Collingwood with a conviction that grew from page to page: '*We are told*, moreover, that he described the world as ποίημα θεοῦ [p. 31f] . . . for *he said that* God is "older" than the world [p. 32] . . . the divine activity of which Thales *spoke in his phrase* ποίημα θεοῦ . . . ' [p. 32f] (my italics). On the strength of evidence of this quality Collingwood repeatedly asserts that Thales' world was made by a transcendent god! This, indeed, was why Aristotle's evidence was discredited, because gods of which all things are full cannot be transcendent. . . .

The account of Anaximander lacks any mention of some of the main difficulties. Τὸ ἄπειρον (the Unbounded) is said on p. 33 to be infinite in quantity, indeterminate in quality: but did Anaximander have any conception of what we understand by the word 'infinite'? Cornford has argued forcefully that he did not — but Cornford was evidently not one of Collingwood's modern sources; e.g. his important article 'Innumerable Worlds in Presocratic Philosophy', *CQ* 28, 1934, 1ff, is ignored, together with its conclusion (which I do not say should be accepted outright) that Anaximander's worlds are successive and not co-existent. Collingwood mentioned only the latter possibility, the one supported by Burnet; and even Burnet made it clear that there was room for doubt. If some difficulties are ignored others are created to take their place. How does the Boundless which 'Anaximander identified with God' accord with the finite

worlds which in two ancient sources are declared to be gods? At p. 34 top the possibility is admitted that the latter information may be mistaken, but no account is taken of this possibility in the subsequent discussion: 'What could have led Anaximander into such a contradiction we can only guess'. In the course of this protracted conjecture it is suggested that 'in theology Anaximander reacted against the transcendence of Thales into a doctrine of immanence'; a footnote here warns (too mildly and too late) that immanence or transcendence can only be said to be the prevailing tendency in this or that theology. It might have added that not all the Presocratics had a 'theology' in this sense. For Collingwood, however, they seemed to have a quasi-Christian God, at least in so far as capital letters are appropriate; cf. e.g. p. 41: 'This is presumably what Anaximander and Anaximenes said. Whether God is immanent or transcendent the dilemma is the same. To speak of Him as choosing implies either that He chooses for a reason . . .' and so on. The contradiction which Collingwood sees in Anaximander is finally resolved by a distinction, which an astonished Anaximander would probably have rejected even if he were able to understand it, between the *natura naturans* of the world and its *natura naturata*. The description of Anaximander's cosmogony is vitiated finally by a serious error which has already been mentioned: there is no real evidence that 'he regarded the creative process as consisting of rotary movement' (p. 34). An 'eternal motion', αἰδῖος κίνησις, is attributed to this thinker, as to others, by Theophrastus and the doxographers, but it is nowhere said to be rotary, that is, to be a δίνη or vortex. Here Collingwood was tacitly accepting, and re-stating as a fact, a hypothesis put forward by W. A. Heidel ('The δίνη in Anaximander and Anaximenes', *Classical Philology* I, 279) and mentioned by Burnet but not accepted by him as it stood, one more-over which is not accepted without serious reservations by any other scholar of whom I know.

Turning to Anaximenes, we learn on p. 36 that his world-god was 'transcendent as well as immanent'; this peculiar conclusion is strangely derived from part of fr. 2 (Aetius I, 3, 4), . . . ὅλον τὸν κόσμον πνεῦμα καὶ ἀήρ περιέχει ('breath and air encompass the whole organism'). Collingwood proceeds to consider Anaximenes' theory of condensation and rarefaction as the explanation of how one substance can have many appearances. This theory has always been thought, and rightly so, to represent a new and important stage in the history of early natural speculation: Collingwood shares this view but chooses to present Anaximenes' theory in a new, complicated, and slightly erroneous way, on which the following comments may be made. (1) It is doubtful whether the defect in Anaximander's account which (we suppose) Anaximenes tried to remove was the inability to show

that *motion* could generate opposites in a primary substance. Simplicius' statement (Diels-Kranz 12A 9) that opposites 'were separated off through the eternal motion' must be balanced against pseudo-Plutarch's 'that which is generative, from the eternal, of hot and cold', where motion is not mentioned and differentiation is explained by the use of a metaphor from animal generation (in which motion is only incidentally involved). It seems equally doubtful whether Anaximenes thought that the difference in temperature of one's breath, according to the compression or relaxation of the lips, was due to or even connected with motion, as Collingwood suggests on p. 38. (2) In his anxiety to portray Anaximenes as almost a Pythagorean Collingwood exaggerated his un-Ionian activities. Surely, as most historians of the period have held, Anaximenes thought that his discovery about condensation and rarefaction (suggesting a quantitative basis for essential differences of appearance and behaviour) had made the idea of a single first substance possible at last? (3) I doubt if there is any virtue whatsoever in the characterization of Anaximenes as a nascent Pythagorean. Collingwood admitted (p. 39f) that the concept of differentiation by rarefaction and condensation is only 'a bare rudiment of Pythagoreanism': but the fact that in Anaximenes there is no hint of difference of arrangement properly speaking, but only of greater or smaller quantities of the same thing — presumably arranged similarly — in the same space, separates him by a whole world from the Pythagorean concept of different mathematical arrangements of matter. Pythagoras himself was probably led to adopt this theory by a quite new discovery, that the most important intervals in the musical scale can invariably be expressed as relationships of whole numbers; it was this observation, and not the attempt to improve still further upon the Ionian efforts to achieve a transition between a single first principle and the manifold world of the senses, that led to Pythagoreanism. If there is any foreshadowing of this belief in Anaximenes it is unconscious: indeed if any truly Ionian philosopher did independently place emphasis on the structure of things rather than their substance it was Heraclitus, who was younger than Pythagoras and could theoretically have been influenced by the knowledge of his discoveries. Yet in Collingwood's account of Pythagoras (pp. 49ff; this part was not fully prepared for publication) Anaximenes is even named 'the immediate master of Pythagoras', Pythagoras who 'must have seen that in their conception of primary matter the Ionians were on the horns of a dilemma'. It is as well to be indirectly reminded that Pythagoras was a Samian by birth, but there is really no other evidence that he *must* have had any detailed knowledge of Milesian speculation. In general, however, the pages on Pythagoras are superior to those which precede them.

At the end of the chapter on Ionian natural science comes the discussion of 'nature' which should have preceded the questions attributed to the Milesians if those questions were to make sense. On pp. 43ff Collingwood gives us the result of an examination of early uses of the word φύσις: 'It always means something within, or intimately belonging to, a thing, which is the source of its behaviour. This is the only sense it ever bears in the earlier Greek authors . . .'. Other definitions by Collingwood: 'something inhering in . . . things which made them behave as they did', 'the principle in virtue of which things in the world of nature behave as they do' (pp. 44 and 45). Now it is simply not true that *physis* always has a single sense in the earlier Greek authors; rather there are two senses which have to be distinguished, 'birth' or 'growth' on the one hand and 'constitution' or 'character' on the other. The second sense is very wide; it can include appearance or stature (εἶδος, φῆ), sometimes habitual behaviour, or both together: English 'nature' in this kind of sense is equally wide. The two senses are closely connected in Greek thought, and Aristotle well remarked (*Physics* B 1, 193 b 12) that '*physis* in the sense of coming-to-be is a path to *physis*' (in the sense of constitution), ἐτι δ' ἡ φύσις ἢ λεγομένη ὡς γένεσις ὁδὸς ἐστὶν εἰς φύσιν. The logical connection between a thing's present shape or structure and the process of development which led to it is a rather obvious one, and is particularly clear in human and animal growth: a man grows to be what he is; his character (or 'nature' in a specialized sense) as well as his physical structure is the result of that process. Clearly the two senses I have suggested would not be regarded as totally distinct; they are none the less distinguishable. It would indeed be pleasing if only one of these senses were found before the multiplication of meanings in the latter part of the fifth century: Burnet (*EGP*², 10-12, 363-4) and Ross (*Aristotle, Metaphysics* I, 296ff), upon whom Collingwood undoubtedly based himself, have allowed themselves to experience such a pleasure. They refuse to admit any passage in which φύσις must mean 'birth' or 'growth' and cannot mean something like 'essence' or 'constitution'. Such passages are indeed rare before the last third of the fifth century. Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 633 (cf. Sophocles *Antigone* 345) shows a development of the meaning 'growth' or 'birth'; in philosophical contexts there is only one certain and one probable instance, but this is enough to prove my point. The certain instance is Empedocles fr.8:

ἄλλο δέ τοι ἔρῳ · φύσις οὐδενὸς ἐστὶν ἀπάντων
 θνητῶν, οὐδέ τις οὐλομένου θανάτοιο τελευτή,
 ἀλλὰ μόνον μίξις τε διάλλαξις τε μιγέντων
 ἐστὶ, φύσις δ' ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνομάζεται ἀνθρώποισιν.

Here I think it is clear to the objective judgment that φύσις is opposed

to θανάτοιο τελευτή in exactly the same way as μίξις is opposed to διόλλαξις, and therefore that it means the opposite of death, that is, 'birth' or 'coming-to-be': so Aristotle *GC A* 1, 314 b 7 (*contra* Ross, *op. cit.* 297f); ps.-Aristotle *MXG* 2, 975 b 6; Plutarch *adv. Colot.* 1112 A. However, at *Met.* Δ 4, 1014 b 35 and perhaps at *GC B* 6, 333 b 13 Aristotle quoted part of this same fragment, as an example of φύσις=οὐσία (essence). Empedocles therefore, it is held, must have meant that there is no stable nature of things, no 'death' with its implication of a precedent substantiality. It should be noted, however, that Aristotle invariably omitted line 2 of the fragment, which is well attested by Plutarch and Aetius but was not essential for Aristotle's primary purpose: without this line φύσις in the fragment could certainly mean what Aristotle on occasion allowed himself to take it to mean; with it, such an interpretation is surely impossible. The fact that on one occasion, at any rate, Aristotle took φύσις here to mean γένεσις suggests that he knew the full context of Empedocles when his own context reminded him of it. — The probable occurrence of φύσις = 'birth' or 'growth' is Parmenides fr. 10, 5, where it appears to correspond with ἐνθεν ἔφω in the following line: Parmenides seems to undertake to describe on one hand the origin, on the other hand the present condition of the constituents of the apparent cosmos.

It remains true that in Heraclitus, for example, φύσις (which occurs at least three times) means 'constitution'; that this is the probable meaning in the single Homeric instance; and that this is far the commonest meaning in tragedy. Speculation about the *original* meaning of the word (or of the verbal root from which it is derived) is hazardous: but the fact remains that the sense of 'birth' or 'growth' cannot be absolutely excluded from Presocratic usage.

I have dealt at some length with the attempt to exclude one possible meaning of φύσις from early contexts; in itself this attempt is not very culpable, less so perhaps than the assumption (held by e.g. Nestle, Diller, Deichgräber, Heinimann; references in Heinimann, *Nomos und Physis*, 89 n. 1) that 'birth' or 'becoming' is the original sense of the word. If this is so, it is indeed surprising that so few early instances have survived. But Collingwood was not content to assert that the word always means 'constitution' or 'essence'; he maintained that it meant something more specific than this, namely the source of a thing's *behaviour*. Of the many comparatively early passages in which φύσις occurs there are none in which it has to mean this and few in which it could mean this. Collingwood's view is, in fact, like so many of his ideas about the history of Presocratic thought, an Aristotelian one: for Aristotle, differences of structure displayed themselves primarily in differences of behaviour; 'natural' bodies were those which possessed their own source of

motion or rest. For the earlier Presocratics, I suggest, differences of structure displayed themselves primarily in differences of shape and appearance. The world which the Milesians were trying to explain was, it is true, a world in change, but they treated it largely as a static world, at least so far as metaphysics was concerned, because a great deal of change seemed to them not immediately explicable. It is perfectly true that for them φύσις tended to be equated with some form of material, because they thought that the 'constitution' of things consisted primarily in their material substance; but it is wrong (as Collingwood understood) to follow Burnet in supposing that φύσις therefore means 'material substance'. Yet Collingwood himself was committing an exactly analagous error by trying to extend another application of the concept of *physis* — this time a dynamic application which is in the main Aristotelian — to all Presocratic uses. It was only when Heraclitus had shown that there *is* a constant and determinable factor in all change in the world (and he like the Milesians assumed that everything we see around us will eventually change, even if it is now temporarily stable), what he thought of as μέτρον or λόγος, that the behaviour of things in general came within the scope of scientific or quasi-scientific speculation. Even then the dynamic view of nature was slow indeed to replace the old one: Eurytus the Pythagorean, at the beginning of the fourth century B.C., evidently defined a thing's *physis* (*qua* number) by designating its minimal shape, and in this he was adhering to the convention of a theoretically static world accepted by the Milesians.

Thus Collingwood's definition of φύσις is found wanting, and simultaneously another serious defect is revealed in his attitude to Ionian natural speculation. The conclusion cannot be avoided that *The Idea of Nature* gives a grossly fallacious account of this subject, not only because of the misleading attribution of questions and answers, but also through other less recondite faults of method and factual equipment.¹

¹ I am indebted to Professor R. Hackforth, Mr Shaun Wylie and Mr H. Lloyd-Jones for reading this paper and making a number of useful comments.

METASTASIO AND THE HISTORY OF OPERA

SIMON WORSTHORNE

It would be difficult to find a more curious and illiterate tribute to Metastasio than that contained in the oration pronounced some years after his death by Citoyenne Courcelle Labrousse before the Club de Rome in 1798. The imperial court poet is ranked high amongst the leaders of the revolution; to him is traced the philosophy of the new régime. 'Vous Romaines', this prophetess of progress declared, 'qui vous pleignez de toutes ces choses, je va vous faire voir comme quoi tout vient en haut et que c'est d'un Romain dont est venue l'origine de tout ceci au reste je va vous dire ce que ma été raporté, car je n'en sai point positivement l'histoire; mais cela me paroit si vraisemblable que cela m'engage a le raporter, le principe de tout ceci vient dont d'un sartin Metastaze.'¹

Wild as this suggestion may seem, it has some bearing on the nature of subsequent studies. It illustrates from an unusual angle the fate of the man who, above all others in the eighteenth century, so powerfully influenced the history of opera and whose name as a poet and dramatist runs through all the studies on the music and literature of the period. But, in spite of the number and the variety of interests of those who conjure with his name, he remains for us as mysterious and intangible as the grin of the Cheshire Cat. Even his name originates from a scholastic trick of his patron and master Vincenzo Gravina. In 1708 Felice Trapassi was persuaded by the famous scholar to allow him to adopt his son Pietro, upon which the boy grecized his name into Metastasio as a tribute to the classical studies of his tutor. The philological change is really symbolic of the translation of the street urchin into the cultivated poet, subsequently the favourite of courtly life for more than three-quarters of the century.

His influence is not confined, as might be thought, to the particular style of music which is associated with such composers as Hasse and Jomelli as representing the later Neapolitan school, a style that is often considered to have been outmoded in the works of Gluck. But it continues well into the nineteenth century. The list of composers who set *La Didone* is headed by Sarro in 1724; and, for a century, the libretto continued to satisfy musicians. Reissiger and

¹ Discours prononcés par la Citoyenne Courcelle Labrousse au Club de Rome dans le mois Floreal de l'an VI, faits et revus par elle-même. In Vernon Lee, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, 1907, p. 348.

Mercadante, after thirty-four predecessors, seem to have been the last; both of these chose it as the text for their operas in 1823.¹ The number of operas composed to the whole literary output of Metastasio is said to be well over a thousand.

But, more interesting than the statistical record of his success, are the opinions held as to the quality of his work. 'The rise of the opera' in Sismondi's opinion 'may, perhaps, be considered as the only literary event of the seventeenth century of which Italy can justly boast'.² And as a branch of literature, he traces its development from Rinuccini the librettist of the earliest operas of the *Camerata* composers and of Monteverdi's *Arianna*, through Apostolo Zeno in the last decades of the seventeenth century to Metastasio who 'carried his art to its highest degree of perfection'.³ Yet he makes a reservation with regard to the dramatic power and truth of the Metastasian idea. Like Coleridge he lays stress on the exquisite 'taste of which there can be no hesitation, whatever doubts may be entertained as to his poetic genius'.⁴ And just as Coleridge sees the epitome of Metastasio's art to lie in his judicious leading up to the finale of each scene by the gradual intensification of the emotional stress from *recitativo secco* through the accompanied recitative or *arioso* until the full force is felt in the concluding *aria*, so Sismondi does not hesitate to show that he is unable to judge the plays without the musical accompaniment. 'His poetry must not be divested, for a moment, of its musical attractions; nor ought it to be put into the mouth of tragic actors, as is too often the case, at present, in Italy'.⁵ This judgment is upheld by Russo in his study of the librettist. In fact to do otherwise would be to destroy the complicated relationship between composer and librettist for which Metastasio was largely responsible. Nevertheless it should be recognized that he holds an important place in the history of the Italian stage as a dramatist *per se*. For whatever may be said now of the purely literary value of his works, they were performed as straight drama during the early part of the nineteenth century in Italy. Corinne in her defence of Italian poetry ranks him with Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Guarini and Tasso. 'Tous réunissent', she says, 'dans leurs vers le coloris à l'harmonie, tous savent, avec plus ou moins de talent, faire entrer les merveilles des beaux-arts et de la nature dans les tableaux représentés par la parole . . . La mélodie brillante de l'italien convient mieux à l'éclat des objets extérieurs qu'à la méditation.' And why, she asks, should we demand of the nightingale the meaning of

¹ M. CALLEGARI, *Il Melodramma e Pietro Metastasio*, R.M.I., vol. XXIII, 1920, p. 46.

² J. C. L. SIMONE DE SISMONDI, *Historical views of the Literature of the South of Europe*, tr. Roscoe, 1823, vol. II, p. 289.

³ *idem*, p. 314.

⁴ *Biographia Literaria*, Ch. xxii.

⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 316.

his song.¹ Lord Nelvil will ultimately counter with his question of 'où est l'être réel, dans toute cette pompe de mots'. But the criticism implicit in this question embraces not only the plays of Metastasio, but also the works of the greatest names in Italian literature. If it concerned itself with Metastasio alone, we could say that the 'être réel' lay in the music, although the author himself conceived it as an additional rather than an inseparable part, whatever later generations might effect. The important fact for us is that Madame de Staël seems content to include Metastasio amongst the great literary names although she denies that they are any of them on the highest level. We find that the judgment now made upon Metastasio once included Dante himself: they were both poets who appealed to the imagination, using brilliant images as their stimuli rather than attempting any profound diagnosis of the workings of the human heart. 'Sans doute il n'y a pas dans nos poètes cette mélancolie profonde, cette connaissance du cœur humain qui caractérise les vôtres (the English); mais ce genre de supériorité n'appartient-il pas plutôt aux écrivains philosophes qu'aux poètes?' Such observations are important as an indication of the position held by Metastasio in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century literary circles. But it is the operatic dramatist with whom we are mainly concerned. And in this he certainly excels, having a fine understanding of a certain range of human emotions and a masterly feeling for dramatic situations.

Successive editions of Grove's *Dictionary* have recognized the value of his contributions to the development of opera, and Fuller Maitland in the Oxford *History* gives a balanced account of his work. But there is no study in English that undertakes to explain the immense popularity of his work or to show how exactly his poetry expressed the taste of the century. Curiously enough, Dr Burney, the editor of his letters,² must be held responsible for the neglect into which his great friend has fallen. Burney described Vienna during his Tour as being divided into two camps, those who followed Hasse and Metastasio, or the old school, and those who followed Gluck and Calzabigi as the modern school.³ Although the operas of Gluck in fact represent a new development in music, they were the result, and indeed the expression of the ideas of many of the older men. Metastasio's own letters to Hasse, or Calzabigi's preface to his edition of Metastasio's works⁴ are clear evidence that the so-called

¹ MADAME DE STAËL, *Corinne*, Bk. VII, Ch. I.

² C. BURNEY, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Abate Metastasio in which are incorporated Translations of his Principal Letters*, 3 vols., London, 1796.

³ C. BURNEY, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces*, 1773, vol. I, pp. 232-3.

⁴ *Poesie del Signor Abate Pietro Metastasio*, 9 vols., Paris, 1755.

'Reform Operas' of Gluck incorporated ideas that had been held widely in musical circles for some years. And modern criticism, following Burney, represents Metastasio as reactionary; it considers his librettos suited best to the vagaries of singers or for dull settings of the stereotyped *da capo arias* from the hands of uninspired composers. The truth, however, is very different.

2

Pietro Trapassi was born at Rome on January 3rd, 1698, the son of Felice Trapassi from Assisi and his Florentine wife. In 1708 he met Gravina, then at the height of his powers having completed his great works *Originum juris civilis* and *Della Ragion poetica*, a book that had a profound effect on his young protégé. Metastasio, as he became, was set to study the classics and, in particular, Homer and the tragedians, Virgil and Horace: Dante, Ariosto and Trissino were his models from the literature of his own land. And good knowledge of such authors was uncommon in Italy at the time. In particular Homeric studies had not been much considered until Gravina drew attention to them, and Dante had been greatly neglected. J. G. Robertson says that Gravina initiated 'that dominating movement of the later eighteenth century which, in northern Europe, aimed at setting a real classicism, drawn from a first hand familiarity with the Greeks, in the place of the pseudo-classicism of the later Renaissance'.¹ Certainly the young Trapassi was introduced to the most learned and intellectually alive society of the time. He quickly profited from it, so that his master was able to take him to Naples in 1714 and to introduce him as a prodigy to his friends. There, he amazed such men as G. B. Vico, the mathematician Agostino Ariani and the learned antiquarian Matteo Egizio by his gift for improvisation and his quick intelligence. Gravina left him an adequate inheritance at his death in 1721.

The brilliant Neapolitan circle amongst whom the young Metastasio grew up undoubtedly left a mark on his future development. For, although his own literary output would appear strangely flippant beside the heavy dramas of Gravina or the great philosophical works of Vico, it was strongly influenced by the principles set out by both these men. Vico was professor of rhetoric at Naples from 1699 to 1741, and his intimacy with the young man is evident from their collaboration in a series of poems celebrating a great wedding and published as the *Raccolta Filomarino-Caracciolo* in 1721. At this time Vico was writing the *Scienza Nuovo*, and it may be safely said that Metastasio must have known the trend of his thoughts. H. P. Adams may be correct when he writes that 'the friends of Vico, though not able to understand his work, must have

¹ J. G. ROBERTSON, *The Genesis of Romantic Theory*, 1923, p. 54.

been at least a congenial circle'.¹ There is indeed no evidence for supposing that Metastasio followed or could, in fact, follow all the speculations of the great philosopher, founder of modern anthropology; but there is no doubt that he absorbed the climate of opinion, and that his subsequent fame as a librettist depends largely on those of Vico's principles that he seems unconsciously to have adopted in his opinions on the nature of opera. Indeed his praises are reserved more for Vico's style than for the profundity of his thought. And it is of course style that remained the predominant interest with Metastasio all his life. As far as the congenial circle is concerned, it is certainly worth noting as an incidental guide to his tastes that it was partly made up of women; Vico's own daughter exchanged literary works of her own with Metastasio. In fact the French atmosphere of the salon gave a distinctly eighteenth-century flavour to Neopolitan life at the time. And it is, of course, very much the atmosphere of the *stilo galante* that characterizes all Metastasio's plays. The accidents of his career, although he never married, were largely the work too of a few devoted and highly placed ladies.

It is certain that his conception of the powers of poetry derives much from the ideas propounded by this circle of his youth. J. G. Robertson's opinion that Vico's definition of the function of the imagination as a collective force in the early stages of human evolution, may well have formed the groundwork for a whole system of aesthetic thinking,² is borne out in Metastasio's work. Gravina himself had stressed the power of the poetic imagination as a means of arousing passion 'dove avviene che per lo più gli uomini sognano con gli occhi aperti'.³ And Vico explains poetic wisdom as a metaphysic 'not rational and abstract like that of learned men now, but felt and imagined as that of these first men must have been, who, without power of ratiocination, were all robust sense and vigorous imagination'.⁴ The immense importance Metastasio attached to it is well expressed by a sonnet Burney has translated thus:

Perhaps the illusion is not all a dream,
Perhaps while agitated thus, we find
Ourselves more wise, and truth and reason beam
Unusual radiance on the ardent mind.⁵

¹ H. P. ADAMS, *The Life and Writings of Giambattista Vico*, 1935, p. 180.

² *op cit.*, p. 54.

³ *Della Region Poetica*, Bk. I, 1.

⁴ *The New Science*, tr. T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch, 1948, Bk. II, Sec. 1, p. 375.

⁵ *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Abate Metastasio*, vol. I, p. 85.

Ma forse allor che non m'inganna l'arte
Più raggio sono e l'agitato ingegno
Fors'è allor più tranquillo? O forse parte
Da più salda cagion l'amor, lo sdegno?

The 'metaphor *arias*' for which he was famous, were for him a powerful instrument through which to stimulate the senses by putting before the audience a train of images. And, when he was supported by an able composer the general effect was such, to quote Stendhal, 'that with seven or eight short verses, with which the poet has supplied the musician . . . the latter is able to melt a whole audience'.¹ The range of metaphors is restricted; but, skilfully contrived, they provide short and pregnant lines that at once suggest an appropriate musical phrase. By means of contrasts, both from the image presented and the actual sound of the words, Metastasio provided the scaffold for a variety of detail within the stricter form of the *da capo aria*. His skill is well illustrated by Russo who compares some lines of Tasso with the paraphrase effected by Metastasio for an *aria* from *Achilles in Scyros* which we shall quote later. It is a good example of the Metastasian methods, the details of which it may be useful to summarize.

The libretto for Italian opera at this date was written in three styles to suit the musician. First the action of the plot was designed to be set in recitative; secondly, in moments of particular stress the orchestra would accompany the recitative in a commentary on the thoughts as they passed through the mind of the protagonist; thirdly there were the verses for the *arias*. These verses were 'come germogli alle radice' as one critic described them.² They blossomed from the dramatic situation as laid out in the recitative, and were intended to give a general application to the particular event. Metastasio, as has been said, achieved his end by choosing a series of images suitable for musical treatment. He held that whereas moral qualities could not be portrayed in music, states of mind, joy or despair, rage or tranquillity, lent themselves easily to such treatment. He was in this respect a master of the Italian language for he was able to choose words that not only adapted themselves easily to musical expression, but were actually an inspiration to composers from the beauty of their sound, in spite of the often trite sentiments they expressed. 'Il prepotente istinto musicale salva spesso volte', writes Russo,³ 'il nostro scrittore dalla sonora rotondità di maniera, da quel vezzo dei poeti italiani di tormentare squisitamente per la finezza e il liscio dei particolari'. Mozart always considered him to be the greatest librettist and the earlier composers of opera, Vinci, Hasse and Jomelli depended upon him for their texts.

The following scene will show how he leads up through the

¹ L. A. C. BOMBET, *The Lives of Haydn and Mozart with observations on Metastasio*, 1818, p. 432.

² F. QUADRIO, *Della Storia, e della Ragione d'ogni Poesia*, 1739, vol. V, p. 446.

³ op. cit., p. 171.

recitative to the *aria*; and, when compared to the passage from Tasso, himself one of the most musical of Italians and the author of the famous phrase 'la musica è la dolcezza e quasi l'anima della poesia', it can be seen that Metastasio uses an economy of phrase even better suited to the needs of the composers than the older and more distinguished poet.

(Tasso)

Così leon, che anzi l'orribil chioma
 Con muggito scotea superbo e fero
 Se poi vede il ministro onde fu doma
 La natia ferità del core altero,
 Può del giogo soffrir l'ignobil soma,
 E teme le minacce, e il duro impero;
 Né i gran velli, i gran denti, e l'unghie ch'anno
 Tanta in sé forza, insuperbire il fanno.

(Metastasio)

Oh incredibile, oh strano
 miracolo d'amor! Si muova all'ira,
 è terribile Achille; arte non giova,
 forza non basta a raffrenarlo: andrebbe
 nudo in mezzo agl'incendi, andrebbe solo
 ad affrontar mille nemici e mille.
 Pensi a Deidamia, è mansueto Achille.

Cori leon feroce,
 Che stegna i lacci e freme,
 Al cenno d'ana voce
 Perde l'urato ardir,
 Ed a tal segno obblia
 La ferità natia,
 Che quella mair che teme
 Va placido a lamber.¹

¹ O! miracle of all-commanding love!
 Surpassing our belief! When anger fires
 His daring soul, Achilles, terrible,
 Nor art nor force restrains: his fury then
 Would naked rush through circling fire, and meet
 Alone a thousand foes; but let him think
 On Deidamia once, the fierce Achilles,
 Forgets his rage and softens to a woman.

The lion stern, whose proud disdain,
 With lordly roar rejects the chain,
 Whene'er his keeper's voice he hears,
 At once subdued his rage appears;
 He yields submissive to command,
 And mildly licks the chastening hand. (tr. Hoole.)

Tasso,
of the
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more

It is a frequent criticism that the audience at an *opera seria* cared nothing for the dramatic force of the plot, chattered during the singing of the recitatives, being reduced to wrapt silence only for the *arias* so that the whole work was as incongruous as a rope of priceless pearls strung on a piece of string. This may well have been the case towards the end of the century. Burney says as much when describing a visit to La Scala.¹ And 'whatever is merely preparatory is thrown into recitative',² writes Stendhal, as if it were of little account. Yet Metastasio himself gives evidence that such had not always been the case. At a performance of *Demetrio*, his second opera for Vienna, he wrote to his Italian patroness Signora Bulgarina that 'not withstanding the respect for the Sovereign, in many of the recitatives, the applause of the theatre was not restrained by his presence'.³ Oddly enough, Calzabigi, the librettist of the 'new style' of opera seems to adopt the attitude often attributed to the older poet.⁴

However, for a most illuminating study of the nature of the relationship between poet and musician at this period, Metastasio's letter to Hasse on the subject of the accompanied recitative is of the greatest importance.⁵ Here he enters into a detailed exposition of his views too long to quote in full. He describes first of all the appearance and characteristics of every *dramatis persona* so that the music for each shall be suitable. He follows this with a detailed examination of several scenes, pointing out any particular passage that demands a certain kind of musical treatment, for which he puts forward a few tentative suggestions of the kind seen in the following passage and dealing with the final scene of the opera.

The instruments should be silent when the other personages speak; and, if you approve of it, may be employed whenever the Prototype speaks in the *last scene*; varying, however, the movement and modulation, not merely to express and enforce the words or sentiments, as is thought a great merit by other composers, but to point also the situation of mind of him who pronounces these words and sentiments, at which such masters as you always aspire. For you know, as well as I, that the same words and sentiments may be uttered, according to the diversity of situation, in such a manner as to express either joy, sorrow,

¹ *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, 1773, p. 85.

² L. A. C. BOMBET, op. cit., p. 439.

³ Letter November 10th, 1731 (to Burney).

⁴ op. cit., p. clxxvii.

⁵ Tr. Burney, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 315-30 (summer 1749). *Attilio Regolo* was written originally for Charles VI in 1740. But as he died before it could be performed, it was not given until ten years later when it was performed to music by Hasse in Dresden for Augustus III, King of Poland.

anger, or pity. I should hope from such hands as yours, that a recitative always accompanied by instruments, would not be such a tiresome thing as it usually is, from others. In the first place, because you will preserve that oeconomy of time which I have so much recommended;¹ particularly, as you likewise so well know how to perfect the art, by the judicious and alternate use of *pianos* and *fortes*, by *rinforzandos*, by *staccatos*, slurs, accelerating and retarding the measure, *arpeggios*, shakes, *sustenutos*, and above all, by new modulation, of which you alone seem to know the whole arcana.² But if, in despite [*sic*] of so many subsidiaries, you should be of a different opinion, I shall readily give way to your experience, and be perfectly contented, if the following verses are accompanied by violins. . . .

We have here then a situation in which the poet is landlord and the musician tenant. Yet though, as Wagner writes 'he might regard his holding as hereditary property, he nevertheless — as in the Roman-Germanic empire of yore — paid homage to the emperor as lord of the land he held . . . ' 'This', he continues, 'is the situation which has always favoured the production of what is best in opera as a department of dramatic art'.³ But Wagner is under the delusion that 'Metastasio's great reputation was based upon the fact that he never gave the musician any trouble'.⁴ In the sense that his language was naturally musical, this is correct. But the correspondence with Hasse is sufficient witness that the poet was the collaborator and by no means the slave of the composer. In fact Metastasio criticized Galuppi as an opera composer for his inability to work with the poet, although he is a good composer of vocal music.⁵ Burney even accused Gluck himself of subservience to the poet, and considered that his popularity in France was, amongst other things, due to the French love for poetry above music.⁶ 'The French', Metastasio told Casanova, 'entertain the very strange belief that it is possible to adapt poetry to music already composed'.⁷ He himself wrote music to his *arias* although he never showed it to anyone. But this was, as it were, the final test before giving the lines to a real musician. He was not, in his own estimation 'initiated into the mysteries of harmony, or at least but slightly',⁸ although Artaria actually published

¹ Metastasio has previously warned Hasse against the lessening of dramatic force should the singer be compelled to wait for an orchestral passage.

² Burney notes 'these technical terms, and the refinements they express, were but little known, at least in England, forty years ago'.

³ *Opera and Drama*, tr. Evans, 1913, vol. I, p. 153.

⁴ *idem*, p. 29.

⁵ BURNLEY, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 297.

⁶ *idem*, vol. II, p. 88, n. 1.

⁷ *Memoirs of Jacques Casanova*, tr. A. Tolliab, 1863, vol. V, p. 117.

⁸ BURNLEY, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 257. Letter to Burney, May 4th, 1761.

some *Canoni* in 1782 by him. But there is no other evidence of his practical skill. However, he assured Casanova that the production of the poems themselves entailed great care and hard work. He was able to write no more than fourteen lines each day,¹ from which it may be seen that the writing of a libretto was not the superficial labour it is sometimes alleged to be.

However, in the great changes in musical taste that were to occur towards the middle of the eighteenth century in Germany, Metastasio held the place of an enlightened conservative. In all questions relating to opera his views are sensible and show an acute understanding of the problems. He is against the *bravura aria* that is of little musical value and serves only to show off the technical ability of the singer. He is intensely aware of the need for music to underline each nuance of the dramatic situation. Above all, he feels the need that music should find the road to the hearts of others. But for him, as with Rousseau, it is effective only when it is joined to words. Instrumental music is only learned music, and any attempt to increase the claims of the orchestra is regarded with suspicion. Jomelli's style of composition, adapted to suit German taste, in which the orchestra plays an increasingly large part, is deplored in an extremely interesting letter to that composer.² And his comments written to Chastellux after reading the *Essai sur l'union de la Poesie et de la Musique* (1765) show that he regards music 'as an ingenious, admirable, delightful, enchantress; capable of producing wonders by herself, and, when accompanied by poetry, and willing to make a good use of her immense riches, able not only to awaken and express her imitations, but to illustrate and enforce every emotion of the human heart'.³ But the *Essai* was published before the works of Algarotti or Arteaga. And Chastellux was almost alone in his appreciation of the powers of instrumental music. It is unlikely that Metastasio ever considered it as a rival to opera in the directness of its approach to the heart. However, the great flowering of instrumental music that sprang up in Germany and Austria from the middle of the century onwards can be accounted for, to a great extent, by the importance attached to the orchestra in the works of the Italian school of *opera seria*, the credit for which must be given largely to Metastasio from his attention to the accompanied recitative.

In the operas of the new school, with Gluck as a representative figure, it is the skilful use of the chorus, an inheritance from the French tradition, that is held to have introduced a novel element into general operatic methods. In fact Metastasio is often con-

¹ op. cit., vol. V, p. 117.

² BURNEY, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 374-7, April 6th, 1765.

³ Idem, vol. II, p. 322.

sidered to have neglected this aspect, and thus to have contributed to the decline of the *opera seria*. But this is not an altogether fair assessment of the situation. He does not, it is true, use the chorus in the intensely dramatic way that subsequent writers have done. Yet he does not entirely neglect it. It is possible to cite *La Clemenza di Tito* as an easily accessible example, at least as far as Mozart's setting is concerned. For although Mozart was obliged to alter the text to some extent, no new choruses are added, if we except the choral interjections in the finale to Act I, apart from No. 15 in Act II. They are, however, adapted to suit the composer's intentions. And the libretto in general has undergone numerous alterations, the most surprising being the magnificent soliloquies for Titus intended for the accompanied recitative.¹ *La Clemenza di Tito* is not an isolated example: the chorus in *Olimpiade* is treated as an integral part of the structure; it mingles with the principal characters so that musical numbers can be written on an imposing scale. And others of his texts follow a similar plan. Moreover, the concerted numbers in which Mozart displays so much genius are not lacking from these librettos. Hasse and Jomelli may not have written vocal trios or quartets on any extended scale; but they were conforming to musical taste. The texts did not preclude any such pieces and in this the librettos were in advance of the times. In fact it is probable that a serious study of Metastasio's works, and a comparison of the numerous settings throughout the century, would throw great light on operatic conditions during the century. For he provided a steady framework within which the great changes in musical style could be fashioned.

Opinion as to his merits has altered. For Madame de Staël he was the great dramatic poet; for Wagner a subservient hack; for us he is an eighteenth-century bore. But perhaps Sismondi gives the balanced judgment. He realizes the limitations of the *genre* but is quick to perceive that within those limits Metastasio is the master. For, he says, 'if we have the candour to keep in view that Metastasio was the poet of the opera; that the emotions he wished to excite were all in reference to music, and were never intended to have violent or painful impressions on the mind; we shall cease to reproach him for his voluptuous tenderness and effeminacy, for the ideal beauty of his sentiments, and even for the invariably happy termination of his pieces. We perceive that these defects were inherent in the nature of the subject, and not in the poet who treated it; and we, also, feel sensible that he carried his art to its highest degree of perfection'.²

We have tried to throw some light on the methods Metastasio used, and to include him amongst those who contributed to the increasing range of musical expression brought about by the de-

¹ Act III, 4 and 7 in Metastasio's text.

² *op. cit.*, p. 314.

velopment of the powers of the orchestra through its incorporation into the drama of the plots, as distinct from the subsidiary role of an accompaniment. But no study can do him full justice unless it springs from an understanding of the aesthetic principle upon which he based his ideas. Sismondi, even, is speaking a half truth when he says that Metastasio never intended to leave violent or painful impressions upon the mind. The powerful finale of *Didone*, where Dido flings herself despairingly into the burning city, is proof enough of his ability to carry through the most violent episodes. And, if his heroes are weak and effeminate, they are so judged only from the statuesque characters of the printed page. We must remember that he offers them to the composer with the cry of 'Music, awake her; strike! 'Tis time; descend; be stone no more'; then the imagination, the force of which he had learned from his early acquaintance with the brilliant circle centering around Vico, would seize upon the listener and compel him to feel with violent sympathy all the despair of the rejected suitor, or the proud triumph of the successful hero. A libretto of this kind is no more a period piece than the music that redeems it. And, since we are accustomed to attune our ears to an older musical idiom, we should not lag in our ability to appreciate its literary counterpart. But no intelligent study can be attempted until we understand that behind the limitations so apparent on a superficial acquaintance of the texts there lies a carefully considered set of aesthetic principles.

EVENING IN THE BOTANICS: A TROPICAL ESSAY

PATRICK ANDERSON

It had been extraordinarily hot and now, at evening, in the damp green twilight — or was it twilight only under the bamboos and the palms? — it seemed by contrast cool. The grass on the great flat field looked blue, softened by vapour; there were young Asians playing cricket, and young Asians coming up the concrete steps wet and half-naked from football, and children trailing round the pond with its three or four water-lilies and its dismal little island on which a solitary European woman in pink was bending over something, questioning. The energy of the cricketers, the woman's intentness and, now, the panting rush and gambol of dogs — such actions sank, as though the earth absorbed them and sighed. Malays, walking in single file, a man, two women, a boy (one of the women pregnant, the boy ridiculously sensitive about dogs) became threaded to a garland. The cricketers were a pattern on a carpet, a memory of distant times, dwindling into a small fierce eloquence of posture. And the men in white drill, taking their constitutional near the renga trees — from the Air Force mess? from houses allotted to the staff of the Commissioner General? — blurred like writing at which one stares too long.

To the north, to the north-west views, heat-stunned all day, knocked down and stretched out flat, rose to their knees in a silvery convalescence. The sky echoed them, matching their feathers and gauze with clouds of cleaner outline in a more metallic air. Already it began to sketch the sails, gulfs, ribbed sands of sunset. But along the road to the Botanical Gardens (the jungle trees rising in a cliff beyond the many stucco mansions) one walked now in the sealed atmosphere of innumerable interlacing leaves: ferns beside one, antler ferns sprouting from the branches thirty feet above the ground, creepers dangling, a green stem of bamboo bent in an arch over one's head and then, suddenly, the mild serpentine sway, out, down and up, of an orchid plant tipped with a white star. The clop-clop of Chinese sandals; a crude wooden sole strapped on with imitation red leather. But no, this was the new fashionable kind, fastened with elaborate plastic in twisted yellow and blue. An unassuming presence, white shorts, white shirt, pale skin. Much combed glossy hair. Face locked-up, bland, girlish but (one turned to look) the sandals, the flat feet caused by the sandals, put doggedness under what should have been a wisp, gliding. Scars, too, on those pale legs inexorably

propelled. A bicycle whirred. An old bicycle, bearing an old seamed Indian in shirt and trousers of government buff. What was it someone in Shakespeare said of Othello? Sooty bosom. A sooty bosom on a bicycle passed; slowly, in deep shade. And here, where the road divided once and then divided again, where the roadside trees broke up and became a cliff, the prow of a liner, and cut through to the left a path plunged to shambling attap huts (somebody's peons, somebody's labourers' lines), an even sootier bosom swung a chungkol up and down, making a trench, but with the look of a man who has been left behind, who is about to finish. Where were the others — the long half-naked line hacking a red drain, or swinging those knives on poles with which the grass is cut? Empty tarmac bulged and shone darkly. The wire gates to the Botanical Gardens (or, as the Asians say, the Botanics) had an air of desertion. Foliage deepened, without stirring. It was almost too late to go in.

And yet one did go in — or, rather, with the change of past into present as the senses quicken (with eagerness, with apprehension) before this lockable central place which, holding in equilibrium the artificial and the wild, draws out from oneself a corresponding sense of balance between the casual and the ceremonious — one *does* go in, conscious of something heightened towards the symbolic in one's presence, of something moral, perhaps even political, in one's wandering response; of a loneliness which must justify itself in terms of Art, or a clumsiness needing to be dignified as at least passionate and human. It would be easy to do no more than sigh one's way through these watery shadows. It would be easy to be absorbed unthinking. The poetic mind, aware that experience here will inevitably be framed, might be contented to brood upon images suspended in a pool and glimmering up, with a reserved brightness, through the outline of its own face; might indeed see all this as a prettily-appointed stage, designed by somebody else, gesturing towards an audience more placid than it could hope to be — with a feeling of irrelevance, or nostalgia, or actual irritation, and thus forget Baudelaire's great words:

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers . . .

A great sweep of lawn, anyway: a softened green, freshness combined with melancholy. The sky has the look of drifting away above the tall trees to my left, where monkeys rage. Shadow, and the space it grows in, suggest that one is entering a world where statues live, proudly ignoring the surveyors who have demarcated their paths and circles: a precision, but oddly enough also a mystery. It is palms,

though, which rise out of the grass in fountains, burst into complicated flamelike fireworks, suspend themselves high up in the air in floating showers like the showers that rockets trail. There is something energetic about the palms here, perhaps because they are young and still close to the ground, or because they are of a tense squat species. Something phallic. Something fortified. And yet they always bear with them the signs of their mortality, a yellow singed tone in some of their fronds and, beneath the live fronds, festoons of deadness, which one notices especially when they stand near to bamboo, as they do here — 'the tender green' (just as it says in books) of a circular clump of *bambusa vulgaris*. The great palms can, no doubt, transcend this decay; the coconuts leap up thin and high, all green-white trunk, almost hiding those dead blades which, once fallen to the earth, resemble the jaws of monsters; the oil palms make a virtue of darkness, encouraging a shaggy coat of ferns and mosses, making of darkness new life; but here where one wrestles with itself like a cactus, and another is all bladed wheels like nightmare machinery, and a third achieves a rather obvious symmetry, balancing its thin plumes in a languid brittle way, mortality cannot be disguised. On the path, too, there are dead leaves, harder than the leaves of the West and cinnamon-coloured for, without seasons, there is a touch of Autumn all through the year, stealing like a ghost amongst the foliage. I kick a crustacean leaf, and a green-blue lizard slips into the undergrowth.

Here a palm presents a close series of notches; here one swirls with vertical notched lines, bulbous protuberances swelling to a ragged edge where years ago the frond broke off. *Borassodendron Machidonis* is what the metal plate says of the first, *Coperniacia* of the second. Names — one crouches to read them — define nothing. The tree is not to be straight-jacketed by them, like a solitary madman put in his place. Names, like metaphors, are neither logic nor ornament, any more than Keats's 'silent upon a peak in Darien' embroiders what he felt on first opening Chapman's Homer. There is a new thing, an extension. The new thing and the old thing are somehow related and it is the act of relating, the possibility that relationship can exist, which calls out from very deep in one that mysterious sympathy with which one creatively participates, crouching in obeisance before the tree, feeling perhaps rather foolishly intent for what one is doing may be misinterpreted as scientific interest, when actually all that one wishes to see is a second mystery beyond the first — beyond the palm, the palm's name rising in the forest of language. Homer and Darien; a spiral of notches with green dirt between them and *Coperniacia*; Donne, Donne's wife and a pair of compasses . . . For, just as subjects and images in poems mutually reverberate, so now it is the Latin of the botanists which puts on leaves and sketches a pastoral grove, solemn, timeless, in which

Virgil and Horace walk. Naming puts a stop to nothing, encloses and captures nothing. *Cochlospermum religiosum* no more decides the nature and inner-being of butter-cup yellow flowers against white and blue-grey bark than 'My feelings towards you are ones of affection' fixes a relationship. There is no doubt a sense in which a name appears to contract something vague into something more precise, and this feeling of particularization is important, partly because it expresses interest and energy and concentration, which are necessary if one is to live; but what apparently concentrates also expands — it is simply that the expansion now takes place within an implied order, the order of relationships and the order of language.

The only label which Literature can supply is too personal to be of scientific use, I tell myself, feeling rather than thinking, for I have picked up one of those extraordinarily intricate but self-assured tropical pods, fallen in this instance from a tulip tree, and I bear it before me like a gift — not an irritation or a challenge, not fragment or fetish, but lucidly and charmingly formed out of pale-brown scallop and violet-grey tongue — the nearest human equivalent would be some product of the shoemaker's craft respectfully handled in a poem by Miss Marianne Moore. The loveliest metaphors are not 'truths' whatever a certain type of romantic may say, who wants to drown in the one sighed utterance; in every metaphor there lurks a hint of hyperbole, the ghost of a joke. And then, in itself, the clean fresh metaphor will always have something of the independence of my tulip pod. Call the hyperbole 'passion' and the joke 'irony', the fact remains that the poem is not simply the metaphors but the various ways in which they function and are controlled. The cannibalistic poet, who eats the world up; the masochistic poet, who bleeds upon the thorns — neither would tell you that 'dialectics' is a better word to express his work than 'inspiration'. This is not to say that the objects in a poem are not of the greatest importance. Of course they are. But they are important, as they turn into images and symbols, because of the freshness and power with which they realize themselves, and establish an organic relationship with the poet. The poet who prefers roses to tulip tree pods, or 'scenery' to 'gardens', may be actuated not by a deep visceral realization of the relation-forming mechanics within him, but by memories of other poetic traditions when the channels of appreciation were, perhaps, different. Am I wrong then to see a parallel in this desultory but not unself-conscious garden walk as I trundle in front of me the small grey responsive whispering thing which is I suppose (precious word!) my sensibility — no, my *modern* sensibility — while defeating the vocabulary at every step with jostlings and collisions between 'predetermined garden feelings' and 'attitude to the Far East, ambivalence of' and 'sheer animal pleasure, not to be derided' and the desire

simply to give up, be private and dream? I name another tree, *Carapa Guienensis* it is called, and I note another series of 'facts' (rambling dusty trunk, shiny enormous dome). Well, what is it *like*? It is, let's say, a temple. Whereupon ingenuity steps in with some observations upon how a darkly contorted superstition achieves a misleading magnificence. I have named, noted, attempted to annex the tree but the tree remains. As a scientific fact, it is beyond my knowledge. As a personal reality, it has on this occasion betrayed me, teasing nothing but the very fringe of my capacity to relate. It is only the Gardens that speak (but not at all loudly) of order and seem to know something about reconciliation.

Who has not, meeting another human being for the first time and finding this new person attractive, returned home with a memory and a name, and found that the name — Mary or Tom or Jane — has an extraordinary radiance, an extraordinary but nevertheless quaint and naïve charm, for of course the complex of hair and eyes and smile and voice which one has been experiencing cannot be really, or only, just Tom or Jane — and yet their daring to be that positively refurbishes the language — and their not really being that enables one to name them without sacrilege — and, again, their name has an independent force, exists in an order of accepted relationships, while at the same time it is a secret sign; 'I am a lover disguised as Jane . . . I am a mind enjoying the irony of the fact that my mind is called Tom'. Or, more simply (I have reached the end of the palms, the path turns to the left) there is the general pattern of contrast and expansion: fair hair is Jane — well, in that case, Jane must be a new word in the dictionary. All good poems, after all, consist of words that have never been used before. And Marvell's Garden is appropriate:

Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,
Cut in these trees their mistress' name:
Little, alas, they know or heed,
How far these beauties her exceed!
Fair trees! wheres'e'er your barks I wound,
No name shall but your own be found.

Marvell's Garden is appropriate here for one is approaching past a little rain-coloured pagoda half buried in white potato flowers and very dark inside, for the forest bends round it, the more open and consciously elegant part of the Gardens where frangi-pani, white and pink, and bougainvillea and cassia surround a freshly-painted bandstand. There are terraces, lawns, arbours; beds of flowers — cannas, zinnias; green benches facing inwards. Nearby, on one side, is the Orchid House. Over there you can walk down to the lake. It is a prepared place, delicately devoted to what must be a nearly abstract

ceremonial, for only once, to my knowledge, has a band played here, on a Sunday evening, and the people who stroll through the gardens group themselves in the loosest way, taking photographs of each other. Amahs sit with their children on the grass. Malay youths bicycle past. Children, parents, amahs drift off to look for the roving colony of monkeys. And if one thinks of the slow filling up of a flower, as petals seem to form themselves out of a whisper, a sudden edge in the damp air, and join into an indolent circle where, curving out, they enshrine a deep-coloured centre of which they seem scarcely aware — or of a pool quietly collecting the images it will store in its depths, changed and darkly fixed — it is because this *is* a central place, a kind of symbol of community, and yet no one attempts raucously to possess it, no one makes political speeches (although at this very moment in some peripheral circuit of marbled leaves, leaves in purple and green, Chinese youths may be divesting visitors of their Identity Cards) and the flower circle is never complete, never more than the ghost of an idea which remains, consequently, unspoiled. It is the delicacy and lyricism of the place which recall to one's mind *Twelfth Night*, a play so often presented by children in the open air, and as I say Marvell who was able, wandering in the gardens at Nun Appleton, to control, with wit and grace, so much that the Romantic movement was subsequently to labour at self-consciously and in bits and pieces, so that there is a period and *kitsch* flavour to so much of Keats, whose sensibility was somewhat Jewish, and a bony innocence to Wordsworth which at times substitutes the rugged working-desk for the poem, and sincerity for Art.

What wondrous life is this I lead!
 Ripe apples drop about my head;
 The luscious clusters of the vine
 Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
 The nectarine, and curious peach,
 Into my hands themselves do reach;
 Stumbling on melons, as I pass,
 Ensnared with flowers, I fall on grass.

Marvell has charm, a glow to the surface of his work and this, like the fine bloom upon flesh, does not so much disguise as make confident and effortless the play of sinew and muscle beneath. What matters is ultimately co-ordination, the fine balance of powers. His wit is not an escape from his subject: a coruscation, a dance of vapour. It sucks the reader in. Writers like Forster and Jane Austen and perhaps Virginia Woolf have something of this quality; a kitten is found to be playing with a ball of wool, but is it a kitten? a ball of wool or the world? We expect to be soothed; we are suddenly shocked and jolted.

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near:
And yonder, all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.

After the rubies and the Ganges and the vegetable love, it is really frightening. And yet it isn't the shock alone which counts, as it would count in some obvious disharmony; it is the manner in which the opposite and discordant qualities — Coleridge's suggestion — are reconciled. A certain lightness of touch can be miraculous here. A deftness. Poets of the seventeenth century walking in their newly enlivened gardens (for it is remarkable how many fruits were introduced into England just then) and noticing how homely and practical an order established itself in shadow and light, between wall and hedge, though the mandrake might scream below and the stars speak still of ill-fortune, congratulate themselves, one feels, on what amounts to an imaginative good sense, for their imagination, unlike that of many of the Romantics, is a controlling power, a *gardening* power, nimble, ingenious, masculine, rather than an indulgence in escape to some leafy luxury, or a mystery outside themselves of which they tell us with evangelical earnestness. Herbert, disassociating himself from 'metaphysical' extravagances, nevertheless describes them as 'fictions and false hair'; a wiggled poet is preferable to one with a swelled head or a crown of thorns. And Coleridge, echoing Herbert, says of Donne that he could turn an iron poker into a true-love knot, which is better than telling a skylark that it never was a bird. All the radiance, as of dew afire, or phosphorous, that we find in Vaughan, comes from his plants and stones staying close to the earth, and when, in his most miraculous passage, he speaks of a God-drenched night, the Almighty sounds remarkably like an owl.

God's silent, searching flight:
When my Lord's head is filled with dew, and all
His locks are wet with the clear drops of night;
His still, soft call;
His knocking-time; the soul's dumb watch,
When spirits their fair kindred catch.

Admittedly this part of the Gardens, smelling fiercely of frangipani — the waxy white flowers yellowed at the centre fall to the grass, almost with a thud, and sprawl and twist like star-fish, like immodest stars, and the bark of the trees is 'artistically' pale to the point of window-dressing — might be a little too precious, too dainty for Marvell. He would like the sage whose purple flowers turn to silver, and an amaryllis here and there, and the trumpets of *portlandia*, but I see him happier in more domestic and fruitful glades. There, so

much more comfortably than at Tintern Abbey, the visionary experience will take place, founded solidly on good sense, on those properties of the mind itself around which Wordsworth stumbled reverently, all awe and amateurishness.

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness . . .

The soul will glide into the trees; its wings colour with the various light. Then without disillusion, without worrying about the fading of the celestial beam or an increasing remoteness in the voice of the nightingale, the poem will conclude in quiet description. It is all a little auto-erotic you may say: tumbling in melons, ascending into trees — and Marvell has a habit of allowing fleshly shadows to fall on his most abstract moments. 'Casting the body's vest aside . . .' has the same sort of ambiguity one detects in the conclusion to the *Definition of Love*, where the parallel lines, representative of an overwhelming spiritual communion, always reminds me of bodies in bed. Is Marvell being sexless? I doubt it. Is he really so hostile to women, or is his spiritual (but auto-erotic) mood a revulsion from the cruelty of love, the ultimate aridity of love's *flame*: a sort of superior post coitum omne animal triste, or the light-headed freedom that may follow drink and debauch? One thinks of 'amorous birds of prey'. The point is that the poem can successfully contain such queries, and no doubt more beside. But, now, as I face the small prepared ceremonial of the lawns and the bandstand, I call upon Marvell only to be an ally. The point seems to be that here Nature is close to Art, just as the 'jungle' makes its appearance a little farther off disguised as 'gardens'. Two mysteries approach each other and may indeed be reconciled: the social pleasures of Man, at their most lyrical, and the products of wildness, which a degree of order makes even more aloof and august. There is a mild tension and challenge in the air. My response to that challenge ought, I feel, to be important, perhaps because of the mildness. And romanticism, about which I am conscious of having been unfair, has to be considered as I make my response.

The place is, yes, a little bit precious, with the Orchid House down there, and the hanging ferns, and the neat formalities of steps and terraces, and no one in possession; no one having this particular daydream, or speaking in this special style. Rather, one feels, being vaguely dreamed. With the result that there is an immaturity and ghostliness.

But of course this ghostliness is common to the tropics: there is a ghostliness to the rambling untidy landscape with its feathers and its fur, to the air yawning with absence above foliage unnaturally green and then depressingly grey, to the mysterious multiplicity of langu-

ages; politics, too, are spectral with ambiguity as fear presses itself against revolutionary ardour, politeness stands locked in the arms of indifference, and everything staggers silently in the love-hate of colonial embrace. It is a world where Not Quite is constantly in danger of becoming Couldn't-Care-Less. You expect certainty in technicolour, you find water-colours whispered upon the air: a lightness at breakfast, a daze at noon, nostalgic twilight, darkness often as drab as flannel. You thought you had abandoned the ruined towers and autumnal yearnings of the north for the lotus-flowers of completion, and are astonished to find yourself living by flashes and glints in an atmosphere of pastorals and minuets. Not a meal but a salad. Here, in the grotto beyond the lake, is Pope. Here, shepherding a family party out of a Humber Snipe by the rock-garden covered with cacti, is Miss Austen. Those two youths taking photographs of each other on the grass might be Alexis and Corydon. Only might be, of course, for none of these figures has the power to materialize, since they all inhabited relatively placid worlds and the fact that they were inheritors gives them now more charm than force. Marvell is different. Marvell and Donne and the others, for all their dissimilarities, seem to provide a method. Serenity is something for which they have to struggle; they proceed by conflicts; their effects are precise. If tortured, Donne is witty; if romantic, Marvell is neat. Agitation does not turn out to be the prevailing atmosphere of that agitated century any more than it does of these gardens with their witty, indeed positively far-fetched, flowers and fruits (here crimson pompoms suitable for an American Christmas, there brassy Victorian chandeliers) and their lyric subtleties. And what a serenity it is! It is innocence

When on some gilded cloud or flower
My gazing soul would dwell an hour

or

My mind was once the true survey
Of all these meadows fresh and gay,
And in the greenness of the grass
Did see its hopes as in a glass

It is happy ingenuity

Mystical grammar of amorous glances;
Feeling of pulses, the physic of love;
Rhetorical courtings and musical dances;
Numb'ring of kisses arithmetic prove

It has at times the wonderful masculine directness which can say
'For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love' without for-

getting the temporal and spatial context, the maps and spheres, the humours and elements, and above all the unity and duality of love, its loneliness and its universality — and without flinching from its physical expression. 'Licence my roving hands . . .' because 'Else a great Prince in prison lies'. And it can summon up pictures of complete relaxation, as in Herbert's *Love*.

Then I did sit and eat

or this little couplet of Hookes', once again about gardens,

Come, let me kiss thee falling, kiss at rise,
Thou in the garden, I in Paradise.

Is it our own disordered modern existence which prompts us to find the poets of the seventeenth century more 'romantic' than the Romantics? Or do I only feel this because, less than a mile away, my Asian students are sitting over their third or fourth coffee in the canteen, discussing Shelley, discussing frustration? Someone has just finished an essay on the Nightingale Ode. It is 'universally recognized as one of the priceless gems of English Literature'. It is full of immortal longings. It is the expression of a tender but ardent soul. It is, in fact, very pretty. And soon there will be a sunset.

If one of the innumerable phases of romanticism involves a sense of personality, and especially of the way a personality responds to the imponderables around it, then the world of gardens has a respectable position beside the world of alps. What matters, from my point of view, is not the sheer capacity to respond; but the way: the method by which the experience is organized. One needs, I tell myself, a sense of order whether it be expressed through sinewy argument or delicate statement; if there is struggle, one must be sure that the right antagonists are present and in reasonable force; if struggle is to yield to something else, to sensuousness, to patience (it can never entirely disappear), than one wants the vividness and gentleness of personality moving towards its completion and, being unfinished, bearing with it the tremulous equilibrium of its possibilities and fears, memories and passions, in 'a cloud of loves and martyrdoms'. The phrase, as I remember it, becomes focused on a different object for, at this moment, I find myself in the path of a Malay friend of mine, who strolls with all the charming exhibitionism of an Asian student as though along some academic grove, reading Spinoza out of a blue and white book. A bird screams, bits of philosophy float through the air, the student turns a page and bows his glossy head into the dusky argument: member of a noble race, both sophisticated and savage, which delights in the exchange of improper *pantoums* and is at once gay with love and indolent with martyrdom. Noticing me, he gravely

smiles. Courteously I return his salute. Formality stiffens the trees under which we pass each other.

A formal garden, an eighteenth-century room or corridor, are statements strong and secure enough to enable one to dream, perhaps to deviate, possibly to disagree. 'Life is like this' they declare in accents of such authority that one is emboldened to reply 'plus a great deal more' and then add 'including the irony implicit in your precision'. For one has noticed the rebellion of a curtain or the way the perspective tightened itself as though it possessed some secret clockwork which might at any moment spring trap-doors open and slide panels back to introduce a sinister perambulation of marionettes. Rudyard Kipling and Mr Eliot are not often in conjunction but they have both heard children's voices in the trees and remarked that the flowers have the look of flowers that are looked at. That's the way you catch reality: a storm in a tea-cup, not a storm at sea. For our age at least there is more mystery in a Queen Anne parlour than a Castle of Otranto. Hence the popularity of mechanical drawings amongst those of surrealist persuasion; hence the disturbing shadows, not to speak of horses, cabbages and railway-engines, which Giorgio di Chirico persuaded out of the rhythm of stillness, and the meticulously incongruous objects which litter the classical seashores of the dubious Señor Dali. Some people perhaps go to Donne for no more than the *frisson* to be derived from his arduous mechanics; there is a sense in which a Donne poem is an intricate machine, none too well-oiled, which one regards with a helpless rather masochistic admiration, as the narrator regarded the torture-apparatus in Kafka's Penal Colony. Others may be content to bathe in Marvell's charm, without realizing what went to achieve it. These passivities are beside the point. What does matter is an active, creative, in the fullest sense civilized, intercourse between reader and poet. Civilization is the art of making patterns, whether they be pavaues or policies. Patterns catch Life, dreams don't. And moderation catches Life better than grandiloquence.

Ye country comets, that portend
No war, nor prince's funeral,
Shining unto no higher end
Than to presage the grasses' fall . . .

Good manners, standards of taste, political systems: these are, however humiliating the metaphor may seem, among the indispensable tea-cups of existence. One cannot be blamed for watching over them with a certain conservatism for they break easily, they can be sold with profit to Americans, and there seems little to replace them — surely not the straws and orange-squash you are offered by the Chinese merchants, or the loose-lipped democracy of the European

serviceman's beer? Politics come in, not only because Marvell was a Member of Parliament and Donne a courtier and preacher. The foliage in front of me now as I walk down to the lake is perfectly still; long thin leaves, too young to open, depend in neat rows as though hung up to dry, folded together like the wings of grasshoppers, and yet I am sure these trees are no stiller than those, only twenty miles away, which conceal an ambush. The jungle paths are just as innocent. Up there, though, the ambiguity resolves itself in a burst of sten-gun fire, here you do not even catch treacherous whisper or revolutionary giggle. All that happens is that a nut falls out of a cannon-ball tree and rolls across the grass to your feet. The most obdurate of nuts which, bang it as you will, refuses to yield its secret. Yes, Donne was a preacher and Marvell a politician. There is a feeling of responsibility. The patterns in poems connect with patterns of a different kind. But what is one to do, except to attempt by being personal to sort shapes out of ghostliness? Not to give up being personal. Not to give up control. My steps on the soft grass are those of a ghost. My whiteness — this magical, eccentric, comic, dangerous *Europeanism* of mine — turns me into a target. I seem to be stalking something. I seem to be being stalked. And I think, not entirely incongruously, of those beautiful lines, written hundreds of years before any Englishman had felt the guilt of Empire:

They flee from me, that sometime did me seek,
With naked foot stalking in my chamber:
Once have I seen them gentle, tame, and meek,
That now are wild, and do not once remember,
That sometimes they did put themselves in danger
To take bread at my hand, and now they range
Busily seeking with a continual change.

The sky is evidently going to dispense with a sunset. Pearl and smoke-grey in the west, it already spreads powdery blue around a moon as yet inward, studying its own intensity. Down here by the lake the paths are less distinct than the water, which rises amongst them, indifferent now to the fantastic bamboo island it has reflected all day. At the far end, past the long beds of canna lilies, the little girls who sell monkey-nuts go home. No one sits on the farthest bench, blinded by the aerial roots of a fig tree. No one stands on the spongey verge, staring seriously at the flies darting over the lily pads, waiting for some small sound, the pop of a bubble or the slither of a lizard through grass, to remind him of the clicks and shifts of his own consciousness, to say 'Yes, all this has happened to you before — Time passes, something has gone — nevertheless you are alive, all this will happen again', until he looks up blinking, a mutter half-

formed between his lips. But lovers there are, on a nearer bench suddenly come upon; lovers who rise at my approach, straighten themselves, stroll away with arms around each other's waists, and are in a moment distant and drowned. Framed in successive arches of vision: as crystal, suffused with a palpitation of strange fires; as stiff and hierarchic, cut out of paper or wood for a grotesque complacency of gesture; as dwindlingly distant, forlorn leaves tossed by the wind; as, finally, quite trivial. No, not trivial, for she has forgotten something and they return; smile, murmur explanations; her cheongsam is hideous, he wears the depressing white shirt and trousers of a clerk — nevertheless they break through the grand limited visions, the envy and the horror and the boredom. They, too, are a pattern.

Think'st thou that this love can stand
 Whilst thou still dost say me nay?
 Love unpaid does soon disband:
 Love binds love, as hay binds hay.

But the pattern they are now is nothing to the pattern they will have to become.

It was Rilke who described marriage as an association of two solitudes, I remember, as I pass a fox-coloured Locust Tree and turn down the avenue of shaggy Royal Palms to where, no doubt, a sooty bosom is waiting to lock the gate after me. The sort of paradox that would appeal to Donne, but not to my students; who amongst them would appreciate anything so un-cosy, so much in mitigation of sunsets? Solitude in the sense of a temporary dramatic self-pitying state, yes, for one could walk in the moonlight noticing the 'gentle breeze' and the 'dancing waves', dreaming of the sublime, dreaming of a career in commerce or dentistry. Their very romanticism is a muddle; much of it has the air of mere Hollywood sentimentality, all cuddling and Christmas, with something curiously business-like and sensual underneath; rather less of it is an adolescent ardour which turns to the Romantic Movement without much understanding, but at least for other than the easiest reasons — a feeling that there is something safe and pretty in the love of Nature; but then again, especially where politics is concerned, they are likely to dream of the profoundest loyalty and self-sacrifice — some of them even end up in gaol. Theirs, too, is a ghostly life and the closed circle of their University (circular in a literal sense, with a private road surrounding it) echoes these Gardens in an untidier less amiable way. They will have left the canteen by now. They will be taking their solemn constitutionals round the yellow arcades, under the casuarinas whose tallest branches are as thin as steam, under the aqueous layers of the aubitzias, under the tembusus and tulip trees, their white

clothes crumbling into dust, only the shuffle and slap of their sandals to remind one of their ambitions and struggles. And they will be wanting certainty. They will be secretly crying out for a vision.

A vision! It's a word with a decisive ring, certainly, and it suggests a great deal — the comprehensive, the grandiose, the mystical; in fact it may suggest too much. Is it some moment of ecstatic finality from which one can do no more than spend the rest of one's life walking reluctantly away — with the hope of substituting the philosophic mind of middle age for Youth's celestial beams and cloudy symbols of a high romance? Or does it turn on with a gem-like flame whenever the occasion occurs in Oxford or Tite Street or Combray — or the kampongs off the Upper Serangoon Road? Is it moral or aesthetic? Does it sing with angelic choirs, or mutter to intense scout-masters in suburban drill halls? No, I do not think that I want my walk to culminate in a vision, if only because I am inclined to be embarrassed by the visions of others, the much anthologized ones, at least, which too often seem positively to demand being lifted from their contexts by moralists and beauty-addicts. 'Life like a dome of many coloured glass/Stains the white radiance of eternity' is meaning less to me, except as a brilliant forecast of Victorian architecture. 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever' makes a series of assumptions which the poem does little to sustain: outside the poem it is simply untrue. And I do not understand what is meant by 'Only God can make a tree' or 'Tis very sure God walked in mine . . .' *His* garden, but very far from the gardens of which I have been talking.

What I want — here, physically, is the way out, the gate still open — is not a vision but a method. I want to be able really to see the material, to summon it out of ghostliness and discover its dialectics and this means that I must be prepared to include widely disparate and conflictual things. And I must know about flux, must realize flux in myself, must see my relation to the poem I write or read or teach as essentially dramatic — hence passionate, hence fallible. And I must know the treachery and frivolity of language, those expansions and contractions which always contain within themselves their opposites (the mystery of the precise, the danger of inflation) until, far beyond the mere questions of technique, ambiguities become relations and metaphors a kind of daring, a kind of trustful dying in the arms of humanity, and then farther away still, past the slightly rueful masochistic fingering of the gloomy prison-bars or the brightly sensuous net, past the analysis of anguish (Life is like this — how devilishly well it all fits together, how lucid this torture we control!) there comes (in Life as in Art) the triumph of that purely creative act, which is at once personal and universal, a life and a death.

Yes, sooty-bosom is here. Tousled, red-eyed, he waits to lock the gate on the monstrous flowers and the bats and the palm trees and

the orchids. The road, almost certainly snake-less, leads back to the University and one's feet sound re-assuringly definite upon it. The Professors' block of flats is over there, very modern, rather overbearing; the proletariat lives here, to the left, behind the ragged banana leaves. Fans and electricity protest a way of life.

THE NOVEL AND MR NORRIS

RICHARD MAYNE

IN April 1952 the inaugural number of the American *New World Writing* published the first chapter of a new novel by Christopher Isherwood; and more recently, a number of his early books have been reprinted in this country. Both these events have been hailed by the critics as matters of some importance: but to many who only vaguely remember the Isherwood of the 'thirties, the comments of the literary world must seem strangely solemn. At Isherwood's first appearance, indeed, in the full flood of the 'New Writing' movement, his reception was little more than cordial and amused.

Here is a true original: a flabby rogue without, as one would say, a single redeeming quality, who is nevertheless one of the most delightful persons one has met in fiction for a long time, and absolutely real.

That was what one reviewer said of the protagonist of his best-known novel, *Mr Norris Changes Trains*, published in 1935. 'Absolutely real', 'delightful', 'highly amusing' — these were the phrases used by the admiring public of the 'thirties. From the very first words of the book, one was conscious of the author's charm, his intelligence, and his keen sense of the ridiculous. One's critical faculties were lulled, one identified oneself with the young man telling the story; one smiled self-deprecatingly at his comic misfortunes, and felt with him the fascination of Mr Norris, the curious figure he met on his way to Berlin in 1931 — Mr Norris, that shady Edwardian adventurer, by turns bland, shameless, sentimental, apprehensive, cunning, absurdly prim.

He had suffered from rheumatics in Stockholm and draughts in Kaunas; in Riga he had been bored, in Warsaw treated with extreme discourtesy, in Belgrade he had been unable to obtain his favourite brand of toothpaste. In Rome he had been annoyed by insects, in Madrid by beggars, in Marseilles by taxi-horns. In Bucharest he had had an exceedingly unpleasant experience with a water-closet. Constantinople he had found expensive and lacking in taste.

From a first reading of *Mr Norris*, one remembered little more than this amiable clowning. One felt that Christopher Isherwood, unlike Auden, Spender, and his other contemporaries, was merely a flippant young man with a good turn of phrase and a slightly

risqué wit, a comedian of manners amusedly recording the oddities of pre-Nazi Berlin — the comic landladies, the café loungers, bartenders, night-club singers, teachers of English, and seedy political intriguers. It was only very occasionally that one glimpsed a more serious purpose behind the comedian's grin. Then, in the midst of a light-hearted narrative, one would meet abrupt references to the political situation, sudden passages of deliberate reportage, a lowering of the voice, cold and grave.

Berlin was in a state of civil war. Hate exploded suddenly, without warning, out of nowhere; at street corners, in restaurants, cinemas, dance halls, swimming-baths; at midnight, after breakfast, in the middle of the afternoon. Knives were whipped out, blows were dealt with spiked rings, beer-mugs, chair-legs or leaded clubs; bullets slashed the advertisements on the poster-columns, rebounding from the iron roofs of latrines . . . The newspapers were full of death-bed photographs of rival martyrs, Nazi, Reichsbanner, and Communist. . . .

Here, one came face-to-face with a very different Isherwood, not at all the mild, self-deprecating young man who figures as the narrator of *Mr Norris Changes Trains*. Here, he seemed more like the Isherwood of the travel-books, *The Condor and the Cows*, or *Journey to a War*: a reporter, deeply concerned with social problems, taking careful notes on the economic and political situation. Perhaps it was this Isherwood that his friends and colleagues took so seriously, regarding him, with Auden, as 'a sort of literary elder brother'. Perhaps it is this Isherwood that the American critics acclaim, and that writers of a younger generation — such, for example, as Frederick Buechner — seem sometimes unconsciously to imitate. Certainly, it is no surprise to learn that Isherwood originally planned a long novel about the decay of pre-Nazi liberalism, a vast panorama of Berlin society, intended to be called *The Lost*. But the book was never written, and the material for it went into *Mr Norris Changes Trains* and the set of long-short stories called *Goodbye to Berlin*. This, perhaps, is disappointing: but for those on the alert for hidden meanings, there is a sense in which *Mr Norris* may be said to express all that its author could have hoped to say in *The Lost*. From one point of view, indeed, the book is a fairly shrewd and extremely ironical commentary on 'the collapse of liberal society', personified, in its last two generations, by Mr Norris and by William Bradshaw,¹ the narrator. Norris, a shabby refugee from the old, assured, and sheltered epoch, still maintains his pathetic pretensions to gentility and good manners: but beneath this sketchy disguise he is all too clearly the old shark, the ex-jailbird, loudly and mistakenly cheered by

¹ Isherwood's full name is Christopher William Bradshaw-Isherwood.

Berlin Communists after an electoral victory, on the eve of which he has sold out to their political opponents. Bradshaw, the young man just down from Cambridge, represents the next generation of liberal society, the post-war hope; but all his ideas and values are in turmoil, his allegiances hopelessly divided. A little guilty, a little intrigued, he attends a meeting of Berlin workers and Communists:

Their passion, their strength of purpose elated me, I stood outside it. One day, perhaps, I should be with it, but never of it. At present, I just sat there, a half-hearted renegade from my own class, my feelings muddled by anarchism talked at Cambridge, by slogans from the Confirmation service, by the tunes the band played when my father's regiment marched to the railway station, seventeen years ago.

At the same time, and partly by these feelings, he is drawn towards Norris in a strange, amused sympathy: but with Norris, equally, he can make no real contact. There is always politeness, and hedging, a difference of worlds, an obscure sense of betrayal. And while the old world looks on in its impotence, or turns aside, or makes its shady profits, Berlin itself is drifting towards disaster. Fritz Wendel, a German-American socialite, says in his imperfect English, 'Hell, I give a damn': but it is he, oddly enough, who has the final word. Throughout the novel he has prefaced his remarks, quite at random, with the word 'eventually'. The last time he uses this trick, it becomes suddenly and grimly appropriate. The Nazis have just come into power. 'Eventually,' says Fritz, 'it had to happen.'

It is this rather hackneyed picture of a doomed society, then, that emerges as the serious side of *Mr Norris Changes Trains*. Isherwood's novel, as he himself remarked of his plan for an earlier work, is 'a potted epic, an epic disguised as a drawing-room comedy'. This in itself would not be particularly interesting were it not that the author, like his book, seems perpetually torn between his sense of the ridiculous and his rather naïve solemnity, and has often employed a similar disguise. *Prater Violet*, his most recently published novel, is ostensibly an amusing account of some hapless commercial film-making; but seen from another point of view, it might almost rank as a mystical tract. *Lions and Shadows*, Isherwood's autobiography, maintains a constant surface ripple of self-mockery: but the problems with which it deals so ironically were treated very solemnly indeed in his first novel, *All the Conspirators*. Similarly, the three verse plays which he wrote with Auden during the later 'thirties are all of them divided between solemn purpose and high-spirited clowning. Isherwood has remarked in an essay that unless he watched Auden very closely, 'down would flop the characters on their knees'; but he himself is equally troubled by his duality of aim.

Sometimes, indeed, he seems weary of perpetual facetiousness, as if aware of its attendant dangers, self-mockery and self-distrust. Here, for example, is a passage from his most ambitious novel, *The Memorial*, published in 1932:

Mary was describing over the telephone, for the twentieth time, the awful scare they'd had at last week's concert, with the Spanish Quartet. The 'cello and second violin — poor little things, they were almost in tears — had left their parts of the Dohnanyi locked up in an hotel at Victoria, and when Mary had gone round there in a taxi with only a quarter of an hour to spare, while they played the Schubert, she'd had the most terrific job persuading the staff to let her into the rooms. And, of course, it had all been very funny. Very, very funny, thought Anne, frowning. Very funny indeed.

All Isherwood's novels since *The Memorial* have been very, very funny; and in every case the humour has been used as a screen for their serious purpose. As Cyril Connolly aptly put it, Isherwood's greatest defect is ingratiating. And the question which immediately arises is — why? Why should Isherwood, planning an epic, feel compelled to disguise it as a drawing-room comedy? Why, if his talent is for drawing-room comedy, should he try to write epics at all? The answers to these questions, I think, disclose and illuminate some of the central problems with which the writers of Isherwood's generation were beset.

The first of them may be stated in terms of literary technique. Isherwood himself has emphasized that he grew up with the cinema, and always had a passion for films. At Cambridge, he was prominent in the newly-founded Film Society, and appeared as an extra in one or two productions. In Berlin, he saw the Expressionist films made by Ufa, whose influence can be detected in some of his verse-plays. Since his arrival in America, he has worked as a script-writer in Hollywood, where his new novel, *The World in the Evening*, is set. In several of his works, moreover, he has described his passion for the film medium, so adept at recording the external nuances of behaviour, the half-conscious mannerisms, the flicker of expression and gesture. And at times he appears to regard the art of the novelist as similar to that of the film-director, training his lights and cameras on the scene before him, catching exactly its external appearance, hitting off character and personality by close observation from outside. In *A Berlin Diary*, for instance, he speaks of himself as 'a camera with the shutter open'; and in the play which John Van Druten based on his Berlin stories, the quotation is preserved in the title, *I am a Camera*. This bleak metaphor very closely describes the role which Isherwood plays as the narrator of his novels. Here,

he is a self-effacing onlooker, making no judgments, forming no attachments, withholding imaginative sympathy, ultimately not involved. In this sense he is an alien, not a part of the scene which he enters: and in contrast, the other characters are subtly reduced in stature. They can never really meet the author, for they have a different kind of reality: they cannot, as he does, fully come to life. In his autobiography, Isherwood himself recognized this failing. 'My characterization', he said, 'was flashy, but thin. I was a cartoonist, not a painter in oils.' Since, therefore, his characters remain little more than skilfully contrived puppets, they are best suited to the purposes of farce; and they can only be taken seriously if they are employed, like the figures in a *Morality*, as symbols to convey some latent meaning. Thus it is that Isherwood's filmic conception of the novel, with its attendant limitations of technique, helps to account for his curious duality of aim.

This same conception of the novel in terms of external observation, detachment, and reportage, and these same limitations, were especially characteristic of the 'New Writing' movement of the 'thirties, whose ideals are most typically enshrined in John Lehmann's treatise, *New Writing in Europe*. Whatever one's opinion of the aims of 'New Writing', it is difficult to resist the feeling that for some at least of its adherents, social purpose became divorced from individual human reality, and propaganda tended to displace art. In some degree, like many of his contemporaries, Isherwood reacted against this tendency. Stephen Spender gives an amusing account of him as seen by his friend Auden — seen, that is, as *The Novelist*, in capital letters:

He held (in Auden's theory) no opinions whatever about anything. He was wholly and simply interested in people. He did not like or dislike them, judge them favourably or unfavourably. He simply regarded them as material for his work.

In *Goodbye to Berlin*, in *Journey to a War*, and even in the verse-play *On the Frontier*, written in 1938, Isherwood expressed his distrust of social and political panaceas, and disavowed overt 'messages' in his work. Nevertheless, as was only natural, he did not wholly escape the contemporary fashions; and the familiar clichés about 'the decay of liberal society' which are latent in *Mr Norris* are of the purest 'New Writing' school. Placed in the mouths of Isherwood's brilliantly entertaining puppets, they enabled him at once to capitalize his technical weakness and to meet the sterner requirements of his social conscience. Thus the literary climate of his generation provides a further solution to our problem.

But what, one may go on to ask, were the reasons behind this

formal explanation? Why, on the one hand, should the social consciousness of the 'New Writing' movement have exerted such a pull upon Isherwood? Why, on the other, should he have sought to disguise its influence by elaborate humorous fantasy, maintaining even in his autobiography the aloof and ironical role of *The Novelist*, in capital letters? Tentative answers to these questions may perhaps be found by considering Isherwood's private and personal background.

One of the characteristics of his work — some foreign critics have even held it to be a characteristic of all English fiction — is the continual recurrence of references to childhood and school. Remember, for example, the verse-plays *The Ascent of F6* and *The Dog Beneath the Skin*. Remember the opening scene of *Mr Norris Changes Trains*, where Norris himself, 'startled and innocently naughty', half reminds the narrator of

an incident I couldn't quite place, something which had happened a long time ago, to do with the upper fourth form classroom.

Remember, too, *Lions and Shadows*, the autobiography, written when he was just over thirty, and describing his career at Repton and Cambridge, and his family life in Kensington. In this one can observe the familiar situation of a young man uneasy in his conventional middle-class background, torn between his longing for independence and all the appeals of loyalty, affection, habit, and orthodox careers. At its lowest level, this uneasiness assumes the form of boredom. In *Lions and Shadows*, speaking of his miserable entries in an early diary, Isherwood remarked,

By these outbursts, I meant, as a rule, simply that I was bored (a perfectly legitimate complaint, too often and too easily sneered at by elders, in the young).

One might suggest a similar meaning for the elaborate 'Mortmere' fantasies he evolved in Cambridge, or for the recurrent themes of the verse-plays with Auden. Nothing must be quite as humdrum as it seems: beneath the normal and (by definition) drab surface of life, hidden forces must be at work, sinister (if they are to be treated seriously), or comic (if they are not). One might quote the speeches of the two journalists in *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, parodying the 'inside information' of the popular press; but the fact that these were more serious than a mere satire on journalism is shown by the solemn and rather contrived ending of *The Ascent of F6*:

There is always another story, there is more than meets the eye . . .

There is always a wicked secret, a private reason for this.

Likewise, Mr Norris, that essentially comic figure, is suddenly revealed as a tool in very sinister hands: but as quickly, in the last few pages of the book, he is transformed once more into a preposterous animated puppet. In each case, sinister or comic fantasy provides a refuge from humdrum reality: and the dual nature of the fantasy clearly mirrors the dual nature of Isherwood's work as a whole.

At another level, however, the same uneasiness and boredom rise and swell into loathing; and while Isherwood retains a rather sardonic sense of humour, his sense of the sinister becomes a great deal more serious, and attaches itself at once to his private resentments and to the traditional targets of the 'New Writing' left-wing. A revealing example of this is the following tirade against Cambridge quoted from *The Memorial*:

My God, thought Eric, at the window of his large, dark bare room, looking down into the College Court . . . How I hate them all!

Standing there, he enclosed, he enfolded them all in his hatred — the discreet funny Dons telling legends about Proust; the sincere young neurotics, writing each other ten-page notes explaining their conduct at a last-night's tiff; the hearties, divided between shop-girls, poker, and the C.U.I.C.C.U.; the College servants, so oily in their deference to all these rich young ninnies; the bed-makers, thievish gossip old hags, who drank as much of their gentlemen's whisky as they dared, and stank so that you could hardly put your nose inside their broom-cupboards after they had gone. And if, at that moment, Eric could have given the order, the Round Church and the Hall of Trinity and King's Chapel and Corpus Library and dozens of other world-famed architectural lumber-rooms of priceless venerable rubbish would have gone up sky-high with enormous charges of dynamite, and the silk-jumpered young gentlemen and dear old professors been driven out of their well-furnished academic hotels at the point of the bayonet . . . And good riddance, Eric thought.

It would be impertinent to inquire for the purely private reasons which drove Isherwood to break with his conventional upbringing. The general pattern is clear enough; and those who have read his autobiography and his early novels will have formed their own conjectures — a surfeit, perhaps, of public-school ethics; his father's death in the war; an atmosphere of cramping affection at home. Whatever the private reasons, Isherwood broke with Cambridge and all that it seemed to stand for; later, he left his family and went

to live in Berlin. He had become, conventionally enough, a rebel against convention: but it seems that like so many rebels in history he was overcome in the process by the very influence against which he fought. His rebellion, indeed, and the order of circumstances which prompted it, became the dominant serious theme of his work.

Whilst he was still at home, he wrote his first novel, *All the Conspirators*, published in 1928. This dealt directly and forcibly with his own problems, altered and intensified into the story of a son's revolt against a devouringly possessive mother. In many ways it is Isherwood's most deeply felt and most genuine piece of work. His second novel, *The Memorial*, came in 1932. This was far more ambitious and extensive, with a large cast of characters and a novel and startling time-scheme; but today, despite its technical accomplishment, it seems artificial and contrived. Speaking of his outlook at the time, Isherwood said:

I thought of the novel (as I hoped to learn to write it) essentially in terms of technique, of conjuring, of chess. The novelist, I said to myself, is playing a game with his reader; he must continually amaze and deceive him, with tricks, with traps, with extraordinary gambits, with sham climaxes, with false directions. I imagined the novel as a contraption. . . .

That, in fact, is just what *The Memorial* is. The only passages in it which ring altogether true are those which deal, as does the tirade previously quoted, with Isherwood's own personal problems; and it is remarkable how often the same problems recur in his later work. In the Berlin books, they are disguised as a criticism of liberal bourgeois society; in *Prater Violet*, they are treated with more insight, and a little more irony; in *The Condor and the Cows*, they emerge once more in the last few pages, in a discussion of T. E. Lawrence:

He is part of the mess I am in. What binds me to him are his faults — his instability, his masochism, his insane inverted pride . . . I belonged to that epoch. I can never escape him now.

It is as if all other topics were less important, and therefore less 'real': as if the writing of a novel were a kind of elaborate distraction, like light conversation between comparative strangers whose private thoughts are elsewhere. And if light conversation were all that the novel demanded, what could be lighter or more entertaining than the wit and irony and high-speed clowning of *Mr Norris Changes Trains*? Only when we consider the promise displayed in *All the Conspirators* do we feel, perhaps, that Isherwood's rebellion has cost him dear. Perhaps, too, it was even less successful than it seemed:

for the aloof, reserved, self-deprecating manner which he assumed, charming the reader, as Cyril Connolly said, because he did not trust him — where is this reserve more evident than in the so-called Public-school Manner?

If Isherwood's main pre-occupation — one might almost say, his only subject — is the one which we have indicated, it is not difficult, finally, to see why he was attracted with so many others to the 'New Writing' movement and the literary left-wing. As he saw them, the movement and its doctrines supplied a justification for his own boredom and disgust with a confining and humdrum upper-middle-class existence. They enabled him to feel more than personal nausea as he watched the antics of seaside bathers from some smart bourgeois hotel, or heard the incisive arrogant voices of Cambridge society — the Poshocracy, as he repellently labelled it. It was satisfying, no doubt, to feel that the old order was changing: it made sense of what was in origin a purely private revolt. And yet ... and yet ... he still had his misgivings. Edward Upward, the closest of his Cambridge friends, joined the Communist party; and Isherwood spoke of this, in his autobiography, with a kind of wistful reverence, as an agnostic might speak of a friend's religious conversion. But for himself he saw too many complications, too many mental reservations to be made. In the last paragraph of *Journey to a War*, published in 1939, he wrote:

The well-meaning tourist, the liberal and humanitarian intellectual, can only wring his hands over all this and exclaim, 'Oh dear, things are so awful here, so complicated. One doesn't know where to start.'

Even the theories of 'New Writing' were a little too crude, a little too alien, to be taken wholly seriously; and if one used them as themes and motifs in one's novels, one was careful to overlay them with parody and self-mockery, if only to disguise the fact that they offered no true solution.

It was from this mood of uncertainty and unbelief that Isherwood found some refuge in a personal mysticism, as a disciple of Swami Prabhavananda. Since then, he has published little: a few essays and articles; a short novel — *Prater Violet* — which reads like the revision of some earlier fragment; one or two slick but undistinguished stories in *The New Yorker*; the travel-book about South America, *The Condor and the Cows*; and finally, the first instalment of *The World in the Evening*. One can hardly assess this last work on the basis of a single chapter: but again it seems to deal, in a flippant enough setting, with Isherwood's personal problems. Already, in the first few pages, there are several references to his schooldays in England and to his equivocal status as a foreigner in Hollywood.

Perhaps, after all, he is at his best as a simple reporter: for in his two travel-books, for all their defects, there is hardly a trace of the old destructive self-mockery, and the acuteness of his observation is as brilliant and striking as ever. Of his mysticism, he has said little: but in an article published some years ago, he justified his choice as follows:

These times are not so normal that we need fear to venture down unfamiliar and forbidding paths. We know now the place to which many of the 'safe' and pleasant-seeming paths have led.

On this subject, it may be well to leave the last word with Isherwood: but his verdict, if a little unkindly, may serve as an ironical epilogue to the theme which we have traced in his writings and in the movement of which they are a part.

BOOK REVIEWS

CECIL SPRIGGE: Benedetto Croce, Man and Thinker. Studies in Modern European Literature and Thought, *Bowes & Bowes*, 6s. net.

Mr Sprigge in this book is less a scholar writing about a man of letters, than a man of letters writing about a scholar, and this gives his portrait of Benedetto Croce its particular quality. Modestly he admits to a lack of philosophical finesse for this task, and in any case such a small volume is bound to involve the risk of oversimplification; but he has a considerable insight into his subject, and writes from a personal knowledge which goes back a long way.

This book has been well written, with admirable economy and point, and with some memorable phrases and metaphors. It has the advantage and disadvantage of being written *con amore*, by a friend and disciple of Croce. Its only notable deviations from Crocian orthodoxy are the way in which for one quarter of the book his philosophy is interpreted through the chronicled externals of his life history, and for another quarter is examined under the chapter heading 'A Christian Philosophy?'. This must be considered disproportionate in a work which does not have space to consider Croce's great treatises on historiography and literary criticism, for he must have written fewer pages on Christianity than books on other subjects. Some people will also question the conclusion that Croce has revived Christianity by cutting through its myths and dogmas, as though those dogmas were something distinct and separable from the Christian revelation.

If Mr Sprigge sometimes gives the impression of not taking in all aspects of his subject, this is no more or less than can be said about any of Croce's many

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critics and admirers. As an expositor, he does succeed admirably in his chief task, that of giving us a new and lively acquaintance with a man of the very highest intellectual distinction and moral integrity. Where he partially fails is in so seldom questioning the presuppositions of this particular brand of idealism, and this makes it difficult to plot Croce's path on the intellectual chart of modern Europe. The Catholic and Marxist criticisms of the philosopher are fairly stated, but Croce's conflicts with Gentile and the Actionists are not completely explained. One is left wanting to know why modern Italian youth venerates but does not follow the paragon illustrated here. Again, one would like to know more why Croce's cast of thought, by slightly distorting his vision of the contemporary scene, disabled him from sounding the tocsin of alarm when his own standards of value stood at their most precarious. On the whole, this is a good and satisfactory portrait, but perhaps a little too good and too simplified to be quite true.

DENIS MACK SMITH

DAVID EVANS: *Social Romanticism in France, 1830-1840*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

This brief monograph is a further contribution to the series of works in which Dr Evans and his Oxford colleague Mr H. J. Hunt have explored the wide borderland between French politics and French literature. Dr Evans's latest contribution falls into three parts. The first, and the longest, summarizes the better-known facts about the ideas of Saint Simon and his disciples, Fourier and his school, and the Socialism of Pierre Leroux, Louis Blanc and Pecqueur. It attempts and lamentably fails in a similar summary of Proudhon, and says something of the career, but not of the ideas of August Blanqui. The second part briefly related this socialist thinking to the ideas of the romantic writers, and the third, which is shorter still, provides some unhappy generalizations on political philosophy.

Dr Evans has read widely, but his political material is taken almost entirely from secondary sources, and is presented with an unnecessary wealth of clichés. He is also torn between the desire to find 'influences' and an uneasy consciousness of the unreality of this favourite technique of comparative literature, so he compromises on meaningless phrases. 'Certain institutions of the Soviet Union today', he says, 'the *sovkhoz* and the *kolkhoz*, parallel Fourier's ideas'. If the word 'parallel' here has any meaning, it is nonsense; if it has not, it would surely have been better not to say it. Flora Tristan is described as 'one of those who laid the foundations of the International' — which is only true if to have a faintly similar and rapidly forgotten idea twenty years earlier is to help to lay a foundation. Or take another example, among far too many. 'Many Saint-Simonian ideas survive today . . . The idea of international intellectual co-operation sponsored by the United Nations, to give one example, is characteristically Saint-Simonian.' So, of course, are a thousand other developments of the modern industrial society whose outlines Saint-Simon saw so much more clearly than most of his contemporaries, but to call these 'survivals' of Saint-Simonian ideas is to take a very big jump indeed.

These weaknesses apart, however, Dr Evans's book has its uses. It will enable the student of French literature to know something of the elements of the political movement with which romanticism was intertwined, and it will give the student of politics an even briefer and less satisfying glimpse of the literary movement that drew so many of its ideas from the social thinkers of the time. It is a pity that Dr Evans did not give much more space to this latter aspect, with which he is clearly so familiar. The bibliography is arbitrarily selective but intelligently critical.

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G. HUMPHREY: *Thinking, An Introduction to its Experimental Psychology*. Methuen, 21s. net.

The intellectual processes of man are many-sided, and that they present any one central problem amenable to direct experimental attack seems increasingly open to question. Indirect approach through consideration of the *conditions* of their occurrence offers, perhaps, more immediate hope of progress. But within the setting of much academic psychology of the late nineteenth century it was possible to view the process of thought as open to inspection, as incorporating certain elements, namely revivals of past sensations, and as displaying the mechanics appropriate to associationist doctrine. The apparent success of Ebbinghaus in bringing experimental methods to bear upon memory inevitably suggested that current views about thinking ought also to be subjected to experimental test. This the enthusiasts of Würzburg undertook to do. They succeeded in undermining the stateliness of nineteenth-century pronouncements, and brought the problem of thought into the empirical arena. Here it has remained, subject to periodic attacks of varying aptness and plausibility.

This is the story Professor Humphrey has to tell in his book, the intrinsic value of which is enhanced by the fact that no other account covers the ground with anything approaching its completeness. The Würzburg School, by reason of the basic importance of the issues it raised and the calibre of the protagonists it stirred to controversy, naturally claims a considerable proportion of the author's attention. He has brought to the examination of these questions notable sympathy, painstaking care and a scholarship — as distinct from mere erudition — which few modern psychological books can pretend to show. Students whose knowledge of the German language, even if qualitatively adequate, is quantitatively limited will be deeply grateful. Many of them have relied upon Titchener's exhilarating but tendentious interpretation of the original sources. For the first time it is possible to see, clearly traced, the stages by which the description of new, non-imaginal, 'thought-elements', and appreciation of the directive role of the 'task', led eventually to recognition of the importance of functional as opposed to structural analysis. This conclusion existing linguistic and conceptual resources could hint at, but were powerless to enlarge, and the movement petered out. Its achievements may have been limited chiefly to the exposure of gratuitous preconceptions, but they were real, and Professor Humphrey has convincingly underlined their importance. The value of his account would have been enhanced by a fuller survey of the influences current when the Würzburg School started its work. The opening chapter on Associationism consists of a comparison, perhaps a shade neatly drawn, between Bradley's criticisms of that doctrine and those to which conditioned-reflex behaviourism was later subjected by Lashley and the Gestalt School. A more extended reference to the work of Meinong and Brentano would have been very helpful. And Associationism itself, as Humphrey displays it, is already reduced to a mere skeleton of its nineteenth-century self. Its protagonists had been accustomed to clothe the bare bones with a substantial measure of psychological interpretation and analysis. Bain, for instance, in *The Senses and the Intellect* gives pride of place to association as a necessary underlying basis of constructive thought, but at once names as 'the second leading condition . . . a clear perception of the subject to be seized'. He goes on to specify as further vital factors the power to ply mental trial-and-error, and an appropriate emotional condition. Torrents of experimental introspection have flowed under the bridges since, but one is left to wonder whether on balance our conceptions of the thought-process are very much clearer as a result.

A chapter of useful exposition and criticism of the work of Selz brings Professor Humphrey to the Gestalt contributions. In this section, as throughout the rest of the book, the author's attitude towards his subject-matter seems to have

undergone a change. There is more straightforward exposition, and less critical inquiry into the meaning and value of new concepts introduced. This is somewhat disappointing, for the original literature is not difficult of access, and its value in a purely experimental sense widely appreciated. But its explanatory force needs examination as close as that accorded to the ideas of the Würzburg School.

'Thought and Motor Reaction' next claims attention. Here the work of Jacobson on muscular concomitants of mental activity secures an interest which may seem to some readers a trifle nostalgic. In the following chapter on 'Language and Thought' some well-worn paths are retraced, and the author is unavoidably led out of the strictly experimental field. It is a pity that the book was completed too early to take account of interesting and relevant work now in progress on the general theory of communication. Discussing 'Generalization' Professor Humphrey at times approaches the problems of how concepts operate in thinking, as opposed to that of their nature and deviation. But his consideration of these admittedly difficult questions remains somewhat tangential.

Many readers may feel that the progress reported by Humphrey on this whole sector of the psychological front is unimpressive. This is no fault of his, but perhaps suggests reconsideration of a question implied by the full title of his book. Has 'thinking' an 'experimental psychology'? Certainly it is a process which presents fascinating problems. Some of these demand experimental attack. Others, reconsidered in other contexts (especially, perhaps, the clinical) may later generate more experiment. But clarification when it comes will transcend, and be heedless of, method. Many will feel sorry that Humphrey did not cast his book in a larger mould and thereby suggest a fuller and more constructive basis for future work. Alternatively, had he confined his attention to that distinct historical phase which he has treated so admirably, the work would perhaps have shown a more finished character.

Julian Huxley

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RICHARD C. OLDFIELD

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